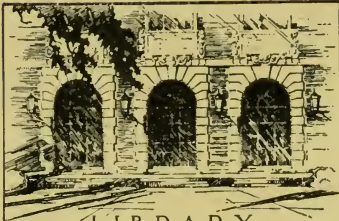


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HOME.

A N O V E L.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

EXPECT NOT A STORY DECK'D IN THE GARB OF
FANCY,—BUT LOOK AT HOME.

VOLUME III.

PRINTED FOR
J. MAWMAN, FOULTRY, LONDON; AND BY AND
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1802.



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Maira Hastings

Ms. B. 1. 1. 1.

H O M E.

CHAPTER I.

IN the evening Mrs. Almorne thus resumed her narrative :

“ For two years I had the satisfaction of hearing frequently from my brother. He omitted no opportunity of writing, and gave me the most pleasing accounts of Almorne, who, he informed me, had been indebted to the friendship of your father for a Majority.

When they had been three years absent, my brother died of an illness brought on by the hardships he was exposed to, when imperfectly recovered from a severe wound.

By the care of Almorne, the intelligence of his death was conveyed to us in the gentlest manner, accompanied by a letter from himself to my mother, which afforded us all the consolation we were at the time capable of receiving.

I felt the loss of my brother severely. He was endeared to me by every circumstance which could heighten the natural tie; and when the connexion between relations is happy, it is of all friendships the most delightful. They have often the same interest, the same attachments, the same associations, and may be endeared to each other by a thousand sweet and tender recollections, which can rarely cement the friendship of others.

I regretted my brother as a part of myself,—a part for which I would willingly have sacrificed the rest; and long after his death, I should have admitted the idea of comfort as a kind of sacrilege.

By the loss of him, I was at once deprived of a most invaluable friend, and of my only direct means of intelligence about Almorne. It was by newspapers alone I had now any chance of knowing his fate; and I cannot de-

scribe the sensations with which I sometimes saw them appear. I was in perpetual terror of seeing his name in the list of killed, wounded, or missing; and sometimes thought the last the most dreadful of the three; so terrible is the apprehension of unknown evils. Often, in imagination, did I see his mangled form expiring in the field of battle, amidst all the horrors of war, without any of the alleviations which Friendship or Humanity could give. These cruel images constantly recurring, totally destroyed the elasticity and vigour of my mind during my residence in Scotland.

We had been there about four years, when my mother died of a lingering illness. I shall forbear to mention the particulars of this sad event; as, in relating the occurrences of my life, it is not my intention to dwell on those which may give you unnecessary pain. Her death affected me so much, that I flew for consolation to Ireland, to my aunt Mrs. Griffiths, who had often most kindly solicited my mother and myself to come to her.

I found her suffering the infirmities of age in person, but unimpaired in mind. It gave

me inexpressible satisfaction to be able, at the close of her life, to show her those tender attentions she stood in need of, and which perhaps no person less at leisure, or less devoted to her than myself could have done. No situation, however, could evince more than her's did, the happy effects of a life passed in active benevolence. Although loaded with age and infirmity, unsupported by a family, and without any fortune to bequeath, she was followed to her last hour by the good offices of numbers, who had received benefit from her instructions, consolation from her kindnesses, or support from her generosity.

Her mind was ever peaceful and happy ; no reflection on her past life could come to trouble her repose. She died of a gradual and gentle decay, about two years after my arrival in Ireland, and left me, a second time, to experience the loss of a mother.

The loss was the more afflicting, as I had now no friend to whom I could look for consolation. Of Almoré I knew only that he was alive in America, and had to fear that long absence had banished me from his remembrance. I had kind relations and agree-

able friends in Ireland ; but I had not a home in which I could find such objects of regard as I had been bleſſed with.—Sad ſtate to thoſe who know how to value, and have been accuſtomed to the delights of affection.—I felt as if alone in the world.

It was ſome time before I could fix on any plan of life. I was unwilling to leave Ireland ; but anxiety about Almorne determined me at length to go to England, and fix my habitation at Ludlow in Shropſhire. I was induced to this partly from the agreeableneſs of the place, but far more from its being the abode of Mrs. Balfour, a favourite friend with whom I correſponded. She gave me every encouragement to come, that friendship could ſuggeſt ; and, when I went, omitted nothing in her power to render my reſidence agreeable.

In her ſociety I paſſed my time as peaceably as concern about Almorne would permit. The war was now over, and a little time muſt determine my fate. When I viewed him only through the medium of my own feelings, it was eaſy to ſuppoſe his affection was unſhaken ; but when I reflected on the differ-

ence of our situations,—on the variety of scenes in which he must be engaged, and the dissipation to which he might be exposed, I trembled with apprehension, and thought it scarcely possible he could be constant.

Mrs. Balfour saw with much concern the melancholy that oppressed me. She had been my companion in my father's house, and had seen the affection of Almorne and me for each other, and suspecting from the whole of my behaviour, that he was the cause of my dejection, she inquired if her conjectures were right. I acknowledged they were, and made her fully acquainted with my situation, both as a proof of confidence she merited, and as she might procure intelligence of him easier than I could.

In this I was not disappointed. She wrote immediately to inquire about him of a friend who was connected with the Almorne family, and by her she was informed that he was expected soon in England.

This intelligence seemed to promise at least, a speedy end to the suspense I had so long suffered ; for as want of fortune could no longer prove an obstacle to our union,

I might consider his conduct upon his arrival as decisive. His Majority, with the little money I now possessed, might render us, I thought, independent; and I had no doubt, he would think as I did, if his affection was unchanged. My anxiety however, was so great, that I sometimes prayed to be released from suspense in any way; at other times, any state seemed preferable to the certainty of losing him.

In this unhappy situation my great consolation was employment in the service of others. My domestic concerns afforded me little occupation, and I never had any taste for idle visits or frivolous amusements; but I could in some measure forget my own cares in seeking to relieve those of others, and my residence with my aunt had sufficiently taught me, that it was not difficult to find the means of being essentially useful. Freedom, understanding, and humanity, are all that is necessary to this; for the variety of human conditions is such, as to afford a very wide field of employment to active minds.

In considering the state of those around me, I have often been surprised, as I formerly ob-

served to you, to find how much it was in the power of even a very private individual to have an extensive influence on human affairs ; and that to be a blessing to our fellow-creatures, little more was necessary, than to endeavour to be so.

These views afforded me infinite consolation, when I reflected on the probability there was of my being disappointed of Almorne. It was otherwise indeed, still in my power to make what the world calls a good marriage, but without affection I could not think of marrying ; and the more I saw of life, the more I thought wedlock a risk to be dreaded. I determined therefore, if he was lost to me, to take refuge in myself, and be at least independent and useful, if I could not be happy.

As time advanced, my anxiety increased so much that I became incapable of my ordinary employments, music excepted : In it I always found relief.

“ Blest Harmony ! how oft thy powerful strains

“ Have raised my sad desponding heart, when grief

“ Or apprehension had weigh’d it down

“ Almost to hate of being,—O ! how oft

“ When the long day hung heavy o’er my head,

“ When all was dull and tasteless ; when my books
“ Were thrown with loathing by, and not a friend
“ Of converse rational was nigh to chase
“ With cheering talk the gloomy hours away ;
“ How oft, O music ! has thy heavenly voice
“ Dispell'd each black idea, and suppress'd
“ Each restless passion ! ”

When I was in hourly expectation of hearing of Almorne's return to England, I received the unexpected intelligence of his cousin's death, who, dying unmarried and intestate, was succeeded by Almorne in a landed property of three thousand pounds per annum.

This intelligence excited in me the utmost alarm. I dreaded the effect so sudden a reverse of fortune might have upon him. I hoped he was superior to its influence, but what dependence could I have on his sentiments or affection after so long a separation ? Was it to be supposed he could be wholly proof against the consequence of so great a change of situation ?

Whatever we ardently wish, we hope and fear alternately ; my fears predominated, and suggested new causes of distress. Hitherto I had chiefly dreaded the loss of his affection,

but hoped, if he had forgot me, that his profession would remove him to a distance, and prevent my hearing of him; now it was otherwise; I might often be exposed to hear of him, and probably as the husband of another. This idea was one of the most painful I had yet experienced, and the most difficult to sustain.

I had passed some days in the most melancholy state, when one morning looking at a newspaper, I saw his name in the list of arrivals at Bath.

I think I still feel the shock of that moment.—It convulsed my whole frame, depriving me at once of every remnant of hope, and leaving me to all the horror of despair. I had no hesitation in concluding that amusement had carried him there, and saw him surrounded by the gay and the great,—encompassed by rivals, and lost to all remembrance of me.

Two days were passed in this misery, but on the morning of the third, I rose determined to exert fortitude. I drank a cup of tea with composure, and as soon as breakfast was removed, got my hat and cloak with the

intention of taking a walk ; but just as I was going to put them on, a band of music belonging to a regiment stationed in the town, passed under my window, playing a tune that was a favourite march of my father's in the last year of his life.

In an instant my father, mother, brother, and Almoré were conjured up before me with inconceivable force ; and the recollection of past times contrasted with the loneliness of my present state, gave me an anguish of heart so peculiar and exquisite, as I believe music alone, could have had the power of exciting.

“ There is in souls a sympathy with sounds ;
“ Some chord in unison with what we hear
“ Is touch'd within us, and all the heart replies.
“ With easy force it opens all the cells
“ Where Mem'ry slept. Wherever I have heard
“ A kindred melody, the scene recurs,
“ And with it all its pleasures, and its pains.”

I threw myself on my knees before a chair, and covering my face with my hands wished to sink into the earth.—That moment was certainly the most wretched of my life. Yet it

might be asked of what I had to complain? I was unmolested by any of the calamities of life; for what was a disappointment in love after a separation of seven years?

I was so lost in misery, that long after the music ceased, I remained rooted to the spot. The opening of the door at length roused me;—ashamed to be discovered in so strange a state, I rose, and advancing to the window, without looking towards the door, pretended to be engaged by the objects without.

After standing a minute without hearing any one move or speak, my curiosity was excited to know who had entered;—I turned, —but it is not in the power of language to describe my astonishment on beholding Almorne!

At the first glance I believed it to be him; but a moment after, fancied it was the chimera of a disturbed imagination; and, overpowered by a variety of feelings, should have fallen to the ground, if he had not prevented me.

I will make no attempt to describe the revolution of feeling I experienced in a few minutes. I found Almorne unaltered, and our happiness in meeting was as great as our

separation had been painful.—The distresses we had suffered in absence, increased our mutual tenderness; and the memory of the friends we had lost, endeared us still more to each other.

He told me that as soon as he arrived in England, he received intelligence of his accession of fortune, by letters which had been left for him in every port at which he could be expected to arrive. By them he was informed that Mrs. Annesley, the maternal aunt of Mrs. Almorne, was extremely desirous to communicate to him some particulars respecting her nephew's affairs which were of importance; and as she was in a very precarious state of health, it was earnestly requested he would lose no time in waiting on her at Bath. This was his errand there, where he remained no longer than was absolutely necessary upon her account. Thence he went directly to London to discover where I was, by a friend to whom he had frequently applied, since the death of my brother, for intelligence of me. By him he was informed of my place of residence, upon which he immediately left

town, and travelled without stopping till he arrived at Ludlow. He came directly to my house, and finding, upon inquiry, that I was alone in my sitting-room, he made my servant show him the way to it, and leave him to introduce himself. On entering the room, he was extremely surprised at my situation, which made him wait a moment in silence, uncertain how to discover himself.

This, my dear Constantia, is the history of my life before marriage, and little remains to be told. During the seven years I was a wife, my happiness was uninterrupted, and was an instance of rare felicity. Almorne had the most amiable disposition, with high love of virtue, and very superior abilities. His uncommon talents for conversation, rendered him the most pleasing companion, and his whole behaviour to me, testified that sweet and tender affection, which is so seldom understood.

The highest felicity that can be experienced in this world, is when two virtuous characters of congenial and cultivated minds, are united by the most tender affection, under the

auspices of the marriage institution : an institution which is absolutely requisite to our virtue and happiness.

I was the mother of three sons and a daughter. The birth of the latter, who was my youngest child, gave me extraordinary joy. Fondly as I loved my sons, I thought my comfort in them, after a few years, extremely precarious ; but in my daughter, I hoped I saw an object, who would always be my companion ; whose education would prove a most delightful occupation, and whose care and tenderness would console Mr. Almorne and myself, for the loss of our sons, when the avocations of life might remove them from us.

But the completion of my happiness, was the time destined for its fall.—I had but just nursed my little girl, when a fever deprived me of my husband and eldest son——”

Mrs. Almorne stopt at these words, and Constantia perceiving her much affected, begged she would not proceed ; but after a short interval, she thus continued :

“ A sense of duty, and affection for my sur-

viving children, enabled me to sustain my loss better than I expected.—To avoid the bustle of life, I retired to a house belonging to my son in Wales, where I lived recluse. You know how I came afterwards to be deprived of all my children.—The world then appeared a frightful void, from which I prayed to be released. I fell into a lethargic state of melancholy, from which it seemed impossible to arouse me;—the indulgence of sorrow was the only satisfaction I desired. ‘There is a joy in grief, when peace dwells in the bosom of the sad.’

I had remained in this situation about a year, when I found it necessary to examine the state of my pecuniary affairs, from complaints having been made against Poole my steward by my tenants. Mr. Almorne had paid such attention to his affairs, that during his life, it was impossible for his steward to commit any impropriety; but no sooner did my unhappy state release him from restraint, than, prompted by avarice, he was guilty of numerous transgressions.

When I discovered this, I was shocked at my supineness with respect to him, and at my

neglecting to employ the wealth I possessed, for the benefit of others. The good of mankind was still a theme which could animate my heart ;—I remembered the instructions and example of my aunt, and determined to be useful to the extent of my power.

The first step to this was dismissing my steward, and taking the management of my affairs into my own hands; but there was another necessary, which I felt very disagreeable, and that was returning to society. Absolute solitude, however, became daily less agreeable, and even produced at times, a kind of terror and despair, which was excessively painful. At one of these times, I remember the sound of a mason's hammer, who was repairing my house, was an inexpressible relief to my feelings. Such a state, with a sense of duty, would in all probability have carried me in a short time back to society, but I was recalled to it sooner, and with more satisfaction than I expected, by yourself.

Your father and mother often visited me, and upon the death of Lady Anson, they brought you to see me. I had loved you

when you were a child, but I had not seen you for five years; and you now appeared, though only fifteen, to have, with all the animation of youth, an expression of countenance, which betokens a character highly interesting.

Your father, with the kind view of giving me employment, as well as from the belief that I might be of use to you, earnestly requested that I would take you under my care. I was very desirous of complying with any wish of his, but I had also another motive to adopt you.

At a very early period of your life, Mr. Almorne was struck with your promising talents and disposition, and often expressed anxiety, that you might not be lost by improper education. The remembrance of this, joined to your father's request, determined me to omit nothing in my power for your advantage. I quitted my retreat, and settled at Delvin Lodge, where I became your friend and companion, as far as the difference of our ages would permit. In promoting your interest, I had the happiness of fulfilling the wishes of my beloved

husband ; and of showing, in some degree, my gratitude to your father. Your merit amply rewarded my care, and made you soon sufficiently dear to me upon your own account.

Gradually, I became reconciled to the world, and capable of joining in cheerful society, without exertion. I was so indifferent to the concerns of life, as far as they regarded myself only, that I became literally the creature of others ; and could, to a certain degree at least, be easily engaged in the passing scene. But the cheerful appearance I often wore, though it could not be termed artificial, never sprung from the heart ; and I have often laughed heartily at the instant I could more willingly have wept.

I am happier with your father and mother, than with any other persons, both from the regard I bear them, and because they knew and loved Almorne ;—but it is with yourself alone, I can enter into the concerns of life with the feelings of my early days ;—it is with you, and for you only, I sometimes re-live, if I may be allowed the expression.

X On every other occasion, I feel as if I were but a spectator of the world. Even where deeply interested, I am still but acting a part for the sake of others. Nor does this arise solely from the memory of my own sorrows; it springs also from the contemplation of life. At my age, a mind in the least saddened by misfortune, can hardly fail to be deeply impressed by the vicissitudes of life.—I cannot forget how often I have seen the blooming and beautiful, faded, or suddenly cut off!—How often the most brilliant talents have sunk, or happiness been overthrown!—Many, now tottering with age, I have seen in all the vigour of life; many more, who have never reached the period their sanguine expectations assured them of. Myriads rise to my remembrance, whom I have seen beaming with hope, and eager in pursuit, that are now swept from the earth. Not a town or village do I know, that does not speak to me of the ravages of time. The busy multitude appear as phantoms fleeting before me,—and though often glowing with enthusiastic feelings, the sad consciousness of the mournfulness of life,

floats in my imagination, and depresses my spirit.

This truth is yet more painfully enforced by the recollection of the numerous friends I have lost. Memory places them before me. I see the convivial boards at which they sat, where Youth and Age mingled together, in social merriment.—I hear the sound of the voices;—see the eye,—the smile, which enlightened and gave animation to the scene, as if they yet actually existed;—yet all—all are gone!

“As friends decay, we die in part,
“String after string is sever’d from the heart;
“Till loosen’d life at last—but breathing clay,
“Without one pang, is glad to fall away.
“Unhappy he who latest feels the blow,
“Whose eyes have wept o’er ev’ry friend laid low,
“Dragg’d ling’ring on from partial death to death,
“And dying, all he can resign is breath.”

Mrs. Almorne ceased, and a silence ensued, which she seemed unable, and Constantia was unwilling, to interrupt.

CHAPTER II.

ON Constantia's meeting Mrs. Almorne in the morning, she thanked her warmly for the favour she had conferred on her; adding, "The events of your life, my dear Madam, make me ashamed of the littleness I have shown in my impatience of distress; if, amidst the blessings I am surrounded with, I have allowed myself to feel as I have done, from only one sorrow, which may be but temporary, how much must I have incurred your disapprobation!"

"I am very far, my dear," said Mrs. Almorne, "from condemning you, for any distress you have hitherto shown. Your feelings were natural to your situation and time of life; and it would be absurd to for-

bid you to feel one affliction, because you may be subjected to a worse. Comparison of misfortunes may lessen, but cannot prevent suffering, and if young persons are insensible to small distresses, they will be apt to want feeling for greater. It is indeed of importance to happiness, not to allow trifling sorrows to usurp the place of great ones; but we ought not to refuse the sensibility due to the least. Some persons, who have met with heavy affliction, cease to sympathise in inferior distresses; and many are apt to fancy the misfortunes they have met with, rank much higher in the scale of calamity than they do; while others wish to restrain sensibility altogether as a source of unhappiness. Its effects, however, and its excellence depend on the direction it takes; and when it is great, it requires only to be properly directed, not weakened. It is a word which has often been abused and misunderstood. Many plume themselves on sensibility; which, on examination, proves to be nothing more than strong susceptibility of whatever affects them-

selves; a disposition more disgusting to me, than even that indifference which makes us equally incapable of feeling for ourselves, or others. Your sensibility is of a better kind; and I shall be in no haste to restrain it; provided, to use your own words, that whatever you may feel, you are not prevented from doing your duty."

* * *

After breakfast, Constantia left Delvin-Lodge; but Mrs. Almorne remained till the evening to make some domestic arrangements.

On Constantia's return to Ornaville, she found, in the saloon with her father and mother, Miss Hargrave and Harriet, Sir Robert Horndon, and her eldest brother, who had arrived the preceding night.

"Constance," said her mother, soon after she entered, "would you be patient with an ill-tempered husband? Miss Hargrave has been telling me, that Mr. and Mrs. Lee,

have separated, because they cannot submit to each other's temper."

"Where there is ill-temper on both sides," said Harriet, "separation should not be allowed, as the felicity is mutual."

"There is not an exact equality of benefits in this case," cried Ornvill; "for the lady complains, that her husband is passionate, insolent, and vindictive, but that she is only fretful."

"Is fretfulness a small evil?" asked Lady Ornvill.

"It is the worst of all tempers," replied Ornvill; "I think nothing of a little quickness; but a teasing, repining disposition, is insupportable."

"Well, Mr. Ornvill," exclaimed Miss Hargrave, "I can't imagine how people can allow themselves to be in a passion! When I am displeased, I am most inclined to be

silent; and the sight of a person in violent anger always sets me a trembling."

"There is a delicacy of nerves about many people," said Harriet, "and a certain refinement of feeling, which renders them incapable of supporting easily, any ill temper but their own."

"My dear girls," said Lady Ornaville, "you can know nothing of ill temper; and, I confess, that I myself, do not understand why it should be a cause of separation; if friends can put up with each other, in important matters, they may easily submit to a little bad humour."

"But it is not always a little which it is necessary to submit to," rejoined Harriet; "the indulgence of temper, is found to be so agreeable a thing, that we wish to have full enjoyment of it."

"Domestic comfort," observed Sir Robert, "must greatly depend on the good sense of the parties; a sensible person will always overlook a mere effervescence of temper."

“Especially,” added Miss Hargrave, “if conscious there is cause for displeasure. When one has reason to be angry, ’tis no wonder if one should fret a little.”

“On some occasions,” said Ornvile, “one must be angry: With servants, and several others, nothing but a high tone will do.”

“I do not find that,” replied Sir John: “a firm, but not a high tone is necessary.”

“I should have liked much,” said Lady Ornvile, “to have been present at one of Mr. and Mrs. Lee’s private quarrels; for I can form no notion of the kind of ill temper, which could make rational people like them separate.”

“To understand it properly,” said Harriet, “you should have been present at half a hundred of their quarrels: Ill temper is ingenious in tormenting, and assumes numberless forms.”

“ There are certain kind of tempers,” observed Sir Robert, “ which a man of sense can never show.”

“ I doubt that,” returned Sir John: “ it is not want of sense, but want of feeling for others, which occasions the indulgence of temper :—I reckon it a much worse sign of the heart than the head.”

“ Good sense,” said Ornvile, “ may not restrain a man’s humour, but will have much effect in managing him : foolish opposition, renders people worse. I should have no doubt of regulating the temper of my wife, though I should be devilish sorry to have the trouble.”

“ How would you proceed, Hastings?” asked Sir John; “ are you acquainted with the task you speak of thus lightly?”

“ There are various modes of procedure,” said Harriet; “ all of which give an

agreeable zest to connubial comfort; prayers, preaching, and tyranny."

"Without going the length of tyranny," said Ornvile, "there can be little difficulty in governing the temper of women: they are naturally submissive."

"Both men and women," observed Sir John, "submit to power; but if you would not keep an ill-tempered wife in constant fear, you may find her sufficiently troublesome."

"What remedy," said Lady Ornvile, "would you prescribe for the bad humours of a husband? A woman can seldom have power; should she be mild and submissive?"

"That, madam," replied Harriet, "never yet succeeded with a bad man; nor will the most agreeable qualities be always successful with a capricious one:—in some cases, I fear there is no remedy for her peace, but desertion."

“ Fie, Harriet !” exclaimed Miss Hargrave, a woman should always do her duty !”

“ How ?” asked Harriet ; “ can she love a tyrant, or honour a monkey ?”

“ Women,” retorted Miss Hargrave, scornfully, “ ought to take care whom they marry !”

“ My dear Prudence,” returned Harriet, with a smile, “ if women could not good-naturedly get over a few scruples, what a grievous list of bachelors there would be !”

“ We should always,” said Sir Robert, “ consider the good qualities of the persons we live with, and not let mere temper weigh heavy against them.”

“ When people are provoked,” said Miss Hargrave, “ it is impossible for them not to testify a little displeasure ; but a sensible person will never be unnecessarily angry.”

“ But who, when they are angry,” cried

Harriet “will weigh reasonably all the causes of their displeasure?”

“Passionate and foolish people will not do so,” replied Miss Hargrave, drawing up her head, “but discreet persons will never say more than enough.”

“But is it only discreet persons we associate with?” asked Sir John.

“Very tolerable people,” said Harriet, “have singular traits in their disposition, which they are not contented without showing to their particular friends:—wives and sisters especially, are honoured with this mark of confidence.”

“That is what I could never understand,” said Lady Ornaville. “How is it possible that a good person can choose the dearest objects of their affection, for the subjects of their tyranny?”

“People cannot always help their temper,” cried Ornaville.

“No;” replied Harriet; “it is not in their power: bad temper is apt to occasion a jaundice in the morning, which gives a false colouring to objects, and after betraying itself in a variety of disorders through the day, would terminate fatally in a gangrene, if, happily, it did not meet with a corrective in every stranger.”

“Yes,” said Sir John, “it is rather perplexing how it happens, that we cannot command our temper before our family, yet find no difficulty in restraining it to others.”

“As that is the fact,” said Harriet, “ill-temper should seldom be submitted to:—a husband or wife ought only to take care before they propose separation, that their own conduct will bear inspection in a court of justice.”

“But what court of justice, my dear,” rejoined Sir John, “will admit difference of temper to be a just cause of separation? We are told, “that we ought, from previous acquaintance, to know the temper of the person we marry,—and at all events, as we take

each other for better for worse, that conformity is our duty."—But pray, by what magic talisman can tempers be known before marriage?—And it is certain that men, who behave rationally to all the rest of the world, will show a temper to their wives, which can be compared only to madness.—Even when it does not go so far, it is particularly ignoble in a man to treat his wife harshly, since both the laws, and her sex render her defenceless. I should therefore support any *good* woman in a separation from her husband, when he renders her miserable, either by his temper, or any other species of bad usage."

Upon Sir John's saying this, Sir Robert rose, and going across the room to Orville, asked, if he knew how the —— election was likely to go?

This gave a turn to the conversation, and a few minutes after, Sir Robert, who had only come to make a morning visit, took leave.

Delicacy to him had prevented Constantia from joining in the conversation, and she per-

ceived that he felt uneasy at this last speech of her father's; but it was with particular pleasure she heard it made before him; as she was in perpetual dread of his relapsing into his former tyranny, and now hoped that the knowledge of her father's sentiments would secure his good behaviour.

CHAPTER III.

WITH much pleasure Constantia saw her brother an inhabitant of the Abbey. His last visit had been so agreeable, that she hoped his company would again afford much satisfaction to her father and mother, and prevent the depression of her spirits from being observed. She flattered herself, the reformation which she had been told was taking place in his manners, was now displaying itself in attention to his father and mother, and hoped the sole purpose of his visit was to be with them.

But she was not long permitted to indulge so agreeable a hope. He very soon took an opportunity of telling her he had come to the Abbey on particular business; that he wished to have some conversation with her alone,

when she could be quite at leisure, and desired that she would meet him in the library after supper, when the family retired for the night.

She promised to do so, and passed the intermediate time in anxious conjectures about the business he had to speak of. She could hardly suppose he meant to employ her again in soliciting money from his father ; yet could not imagine any other subject on which he could wish to converse privately with her.

After supper, when the company separated, she repaired to the library, where, in a few minutes, she was followed by her brother.

When he came into the room, he shut the door carefully, after looking anxiously round to see if any person was there except herself; he then sat down before the fire, which he looked at intently, and began to stir, without speaking.

Constantia saw, from the peculiar expression of his countenance, that something uncommon

occupied his mind, and waited, in silent expectation, to hear what he had to say.

After an interval of some minutes, he told her, that his principal errand to the Abbey was to ask a favour of her.

“ I shall be happy,” answered Constantia, “ to do you any favour in my power.”

“ It is certainly in your power,” rejoined he, “ to do me a very essential one ; and I hope to find you have the inclination to oblige me : but I must own, that, on the first view of the business, I cannot expect your cheerful concurrence with my wishes.”

“ It will certainly be my inclination to oblige you,” returned Constantia, “ if——”

She hesitated——

“ Be not afraid,” interrupted he, “ that I have any intention of troubling you with my pecuniary embarrassments :—the matter I am to speak of is of much higher importance ; and I request that you will listen patiently to.

what I have to say, without allowing your feelings to prejudge my cause."

"I shall listen with all the patience and attention you can desire."

"You must likewise bear in mind, while I speak, that the favour I expect from you may be of the utmost consequence to my happiness."

He paused, while Constantia waited, with extreme curiosity and anxiety, to know to what this preparation led.

"You must know," resumed he, "that I have been, for some time, thinking of marrying;—I find I cannot be happy without a wife."

"It gives me the greatest pleasure, to hear you say so," answered Constantia.

"It is to promote this design," continued he, "that I now wish for your assistance."

“ I shall rejoice, if I can promote it,” replied she eagerly.

“ Softly,” said he; “ it is much in your power; but we may not agree about the means.—In choosing a wife, there are numberless things to be considered. The sentimental kind of woman you would recommend, might give me a damned deal of trouble to obtain; whilst there may be some, in the circle of fashion, I should like well enough, who would be too ready to snap at my title and estate, without any regard to my person. My object is to avoid both these kind of women, and to marry a girl, whose pretensions being moderate, would accommodate herself to my humour in every particular.”

“ I should think, that any amiable woman, who married you from affection, would do so.”

“ Not so readily as you may imagine. An amiable woman is not easily found; and a gay one, accustomed to fashionable amusements, might not willingly resign them:—my wife must be domestic.”

“ There is no occasion for your marrying a gay woman.”

“ Should I be much better with one who has been gravely educated ? I am afraid she might be very squeamish about some of my views and habits ; yet it is absolutely necessary to my happiness, that my wife should, in all things, accord to my wishes. Although still young, a careless manner of living, with hereditary gout, have impaired my constitution ; I am frequently ill, and find that I require the fond attentions of a woman who will place her happiness in studying mine.”

“ Certainly : You cannot otherwise be happy.”

“ Yet, to find such a woman, is a very difficult business. Marriage is a precarious affair.—There is no knowing the dispositions of women, until they are tried ; and you are sufficiently aware, that happiness ought not to be rashly hazarded in the married state.—At all events, some advantages must always be sacri-

ficed for the sake of others :—We cannot obtain every thing we desire.”

“ Where, Hastings, do you mean to look for such a woman as you would choose?”

“ It is so difficult to say where a good wife may be found, that I should relinquish the thought of it, in despair, did I not already know a woman, who, I think, suited to make me happy; but you will have objections to her, which it may not be easy to remove.”

“ If she is suited to make you happy, I should not imagine I could have any objections to her that are material.”

“ None, I confess, that are of any weight with me; but the prejudices of the world are not easily combated :—you must be strongly infected with them; and therefore I expect from you, at first, opposition to my choice: but when you have well considered my situation, I shall expect, from your good sense, and affection as a sister, that compliance with my wishes, which your reason at first may not exactly accord.”

“ You excite my surprise and curiosity.”

“ Your surprise will cèase when I tell you, that the girl I wish to marry,—has—has been for some time my mistress.”

At these words Constantia's countenance betrayed strong emotion, but she made no reply.

“ I am not surprised,” said her brother, “ that you are disconcerted;—it is natural that you should be so. You are taught to view things through a very narrow medium, which is certainly proper. There would be an end of the just privileges of man, were women permitted to relax in their notions of chastity;—but there is a point, Constantia, at which our strictness in this particular should stop, and I should call it prejudice, if you refuse to an amiable woman, who is solicitous to repair her errors, the pardon and encouragement she deserves.—Sally Cusliffe, the girl I have been speaking of, never had any advantages of education till I took her; she was a peasant's daughter, a mere country girl when she was

seduced, and, notwithstanding her misfortune, is extremely deserving."

Ornville paused, expecting Constantia to reply, who immediately said, "If she is deserving, Hastings, and you have seduced her, I have no hesitation in saying you ought to marry her."

"I did not say I had seduced her; but I found her young in offence: she is yet little older than yourself, and has lived with me some time. I am much indebted to her for the attentions she paid me during the dangerous illness I had in spring,—it was then, I first knew the charm of female tenderness. Till that period I had never thought of marriage as an agreeable state; on the contrary had disliked it, and believed I should never marry but for an heir;—but men vary with their circumstances; I am become excessively tired of the dissipated life I have led, although I do not regret the career I have run, as it has shown me what it could afford. I might never otherwise, perhaps, have been

contented with the sober life I meditate, which ill-health renders necessary."

Ornville again paused, but Constantia remained silent.

"Sally Cusliffe," resumed he, "is just the fit wife for a person in my situation. I can run no risk in marrying her, as I know what I have to expect, and am certain she will be a thousand times more solicitous to please me, than any other woman I could have."

Constantia perceiving he again stopped in expectation of her speaking, asked in what way he thought it would be in her power to promote his marriage?

"Attend," replied he, "while I explain to you my views. I shall own to you, that in my own mind, my marriage with Sally is absolutely fixed; but it will take place sooner or later, as circumstances may direct. My design, at present, is to delay it some time, in the hope of bringing my father and mother

to agree to it, and it is in obtaining their consent, that I look for assistance from you. You have much influence with them, and ought to employ it in reconciling them to the measure for their own sakes, as well as mine. Since my marriage with Sally will certainly take place, it is desirable, in many views, that it should appear to be made with their consent ; it will save them a great deal of useless vexation, and silence at once the objections of others. If protected by them, she will immediately be well received in the world, which I wish for her sake more than my own. To me it is a matter of indifference what is thought of my marriage ;—whether Sally is my wife or mistress, my place in society will be exactly the same ; and in one respect I should be a gainer by keeping her in the latter station, for it would rid my house of a number of foolish babbling women, who are the torment of a married man's life. I have, however, various inducements to marry, and if you will interest yourself for her with my father and mother, you will lay me under a lasting obligation."

“I hope,” said Constantia, “you will not desire me to give an immediate answer to your proposal. The subject is so new and important, that I cannot instantly determine what I ought to do, but I shall deliberate upon it well, and soon let you know the result.”

“Do so ; it is all I can at present desire. Consider the subject well, and I dare say you will be sensible, that as matters are, the best thing that can be done is to bring my father and mother to my wishes.—Perhaps you may think my conduct inconsistent with the opinions I held out to you in May, when I reprobated the idea of your making a poor marriage ; but you must remember the great difference of our situations. You sink to the station of your husband ; my wife rises to the level of mine ;—we may, therefore, with great propriety, pursue an opposite line of conduct. Men have necessarily great privileges, and there are many instances of their mistresses having been well received in society, as soon as they acquired the title of wife. This is a circumstance which will have much weight with my mother ; I am more afraid of my

father's disapprobation than her's; and Mrs. Almorne's I reckon upon as certain, which I regret chiefly, because I know you will consult her."

"Mrs. Almorne will never interfere improperly in your affairs."

"No, no; the interference of favourites is never improper; their influence, however, may be dangerous.—It is much to be regretted, Constantia, that you have not been a little more in the world, and less with Mrs. Almorne. She should live in a world of her own creation; her quixotic notions are not fit for the region she inhabits."

"If her notions should fail to do good, they cannot, at least, do harm."

"You are mistaken; they may do more harm than you are capable of knowing. You will not believe it, but it is nevertheless certain, that you are in more danger of suffering from the learned education she has given you, than you can ever do by the society of such women

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as Sally Cusliffe. Sally is an amiable girl, who, the moment she was released from an unhappy situation, was all that man could wish ; but there is no calculating the mischief which literary knowledge may do you.—It is indeed to be feared, that the progress literature is making among women will be their ruin ; the moment they pass the bounds of knowledge convenient for their place in society, adieu to all our comfort in them !—Better far they should be kept in profound ignorance, than o'er step the point, which keeps them chaste, obedient, and discreet.”

Ornville stopt, but Constantia did not reply ; and after a few minutes silence, she asked if he had any thing farther to say ?

“Nothing,” replied he, “but to repeat my request that you will consider my situation well, before you think of opposing my design. Remember, that opposition cannot prevent it, but acquiescence may save us all much vexation.—You have shown, Constantia, that you are little disposed to make any sacrifice of your own inclination respecting mar-

riage ; show also, that you have some consideration for mine. It is my intention to remain here a few days, to prepare my father and mother, as well as I can, to receive my propofal graciously ; and I hope you will consent to inform them of it as soon as I leave Ornvile ; till then I wish them to know nothing of the matter."

She promised they should not and then left him.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSTANTIA parted from her brother in a most disturbed and embarrassed state of mind, which reflection, during a sleepless night, did not tend to relieve. She felt it was impossible to form a decisive opinion of his conduct, without knowing more of Sally Cusliffe's history and character, than she could expect to do from him ; and were she even informed of it, she did not think it was a case in which she ought to trust her own judgment. Her first care, therefore, was to inform Mrs. Almorne of the conversation she had had with her brother, and request her advice as to the conduct she should pursue.

“Mrs. Almorne heard her relation with concern, but without surprise, and asked what

she herself thought it would be proper to do?

“Never,” replied Constantia, “was I so much at a loss in forming an opinion; it is a very unhappy affair, yet if Sally is amiable and more unfortunate than blamable, we ought not, perhaps, to oppose his marrying her; but I am sensible I should say nothing without knowing her history.”

“It is in my power to inform you of it,” said Mrs. Almorne, “on the authority of your brother Frederic. When he was here in September, some inquiries I made about Hastings, led him to tell me he feared he was in danger of making an improper marriage; and upon my inquiring farther, he informed me that during the illness Hastings had in spring, he saw Sally Cusliffe attending him, and was then made acquainted with her history, as it had been given to Hastings by herself.

She is the daughter of a mechanic, who has likewise pursued the occupation of farm-

ing. About eighteen months ago, she was seduced by a gentleman, and the displeasure of her friends on the occasion was so great, as to induce her to offer herself, through the medium of a convenient friend, to another gentleman."

"This is a strange account," interrupted Constantia; "her conduct must have been very blamable, or her friends unpardonably severe in showing such displeasure as could induce her to leave them: at all events, she should have sought another place of refuge."

"The gentleman," resumed Mrs. Almorne, "to whom she offered herself, carried her to town, where he soon consigned her to another, with whom she resided a few months before he went abroad. She then applied to a Mrs. Snake, for admittance into her house, but Mrs. Snake found it more for her interest at the moment, to place her with Hastings, with whom she has been about nine months. He has lately become so fond of her, as to find her necessary to his comfort, and wishes to

secure her continuance with him, as well as to gratify her ambition by making her his wife; for the idea of marriage, Frederic says, originated with her. Hastings spoke freely of her before he suspected he could think of her as a wife; otherwise it is probable he would have endeavoured to conceal her story, which is now too well known to be suppressed."

"What an afflicting story this is, my dear Madam!—I am aware of the pity and forgiveness due to many of the unfortunate victims of prostitution; but what ought I to think of a woman, who prefers a state of prostitution, to a life of innocent industry?"

"I confess, Sally is not one of the unfortunate females, who has much claim to pity."

"Did Frederic tell you more of her?"

"He said that Hastings had been at much pains to improve her, in consequence of which her behaviour, at the first view, is imposing; but it soon appears that her manners are

vulgar, and her capacity mean ; nor has he been able to discover any thing engaging in her disposition. The attentions she pays your brother, may proceed so much from self-interest, that nothing can be fairly interpreted from them ; but Hastings believes they spring solely from affection, and does not even appear to suspect they can be influenced by any other motive.”

“ The meanness of her capacity,” said Constantia, “ might be regretted as precluding much hope of her improvement, but were it better, I should still have no hesitation in saying, that I hope I shall never see her. The woman, who at her age, could think of going voluntarily into the house of a Mrs. Snake, discovers, in my opinion, a debasement of character, from which I must ever recoil.”

Mrs. Almorne did not answer, and silence ensued, till Constantia asked, if she thought there was any chance of his being prevailed on to abandon his design ?

“ I fear not,” replied Mrs. Almorne ; “ it

will not, at least, be effected by any reasoning on the subject; for it has been so long in his mind, that he has probably reflected well on its consequences. Indeed, from what Frederick told me, I was led to suppose, the last time he was here, that he had come with the intention of proposing it."

"I see now, however," said Constantia, "that he came, at least, with the intention of smoothing the way to it, by putting my father and mother in good humour with him. I was surprised, indeed, that he appeared to have no sinister motive in view, and attributed it to his being reformed."

"A great change has certainly taken place of late in his manner of living; probably the joint effect of bad health, pecuniary difficulties, and attachment to Sally."

"I intreat you to advise me how I ought to act."

"On this occasion, I wish you to be your own adviser. It is not a point which requires

the aid of experience ; and I am persuaded you may safely be left to the dictates of your own feeling and judgment.”

“ Were I acting for myself alone, my decision would be easy ; but, for my father and mother’s sake, I must be cautious how I behave to him.”

“ For their sakes, you cannot be too cautious ; but still I am not afraid of leaving you to act as you think proper : and the less he supposes you are directed by me, the more he will be pleased. Your opinions will not offend, if he believes them your own ; and although you cannot hope to alter his design, you may be able to influence his mode of conducting it.”

“ I think I ought not to refuse informing my father and mother, lest he should adopt a less agreeable mode of communication.

“ He certainly would ; but you may, if you please, tell him, that, if agreeable to him, I shall take the charge of informing them, as

I may probably do it to more advantage than you."

"How kind this is! If any person can soften such painful intelligence, you are the person. But if you undertake to be his agent, how will they be made acquainted with Sally's story? I know you cannot offer to serve him, with the intention of giving them, at the same moment, informations that would disappoint him."

"I shall certainly conceal her history, that I may faithfully perform the trust I undertake, but no bad consequences are to be apprehended from the concealment. Your father will not, I am persuaded, act without making inquiries, which he will not put to me, from supposing I know nothing more than Hastings has told you."

"I thought, lately, I could not feel more acutely; yet now, there is no affliction which could affect myself alone, that I would not gladly suffer, to avert from my father and mother this heavy stroke."

“ They must suffer from the fear of it, but it may never take place. Their opposition may possibly induce your brother to relinquish his design ; or, from the chapter of accidents, circumstances may arise to prevent it. Indulge this hope ; but, at the same time, reflect maturely on what you ought to do, that there may be nothing in your own conduct to regret. If you carefully revolve the subject in your mind, views may arise, which at present you do not think of. On every difficult occasion, I may almost say, on every occasion, deliberate well before you act ; for, as yet, you cannot be aware how very different things will often appear, after long consideration, from what they do on the first or second view.”

CHAPTER V.

ORNVILLE passed four days at the Abbey ; and no fond lover ever strove with more assiduity to please his mistress, than he did to accommodate himself to the wishes of his father and mother.

His manners were usually haughty, insolent, and overbearing ; he talked loud, in an authoritative tone, with no deference, and little consideration for others :—now he was quiet, complacent, obliging ; solicitous to converse on subjects that were agreeable to his friends, to coincide in their opinions, and to adapt himself to their feelings.

Sir John was pleased ; and ventured to hope, as he had twice appeared in so favourable a point of view, that time was beginning

to meliorate his disposition.—Lady Orville was charmed, and persuaded herself that Hastings was at last every thing that could be wished.

But Constantia, who knew the cause of the extraordinary metamorphosis, was shocked by it. She had hitherto endeavoured to find some apology for the disagreeableness of his manners, in the persuasion that early and long indulgence had rendered him, in some measure, unconscious of their effect, and incapable of altering them; she now saw that, although not one gentle or generous feeling had ever been able to restrain his behaviour, self-interest could completely transform it: and the more he seemed capable of rendering himself agreeable, the more she became disgusted.

She ruminated much on his intended marriage; upon its remote, as well as immediate consequences, and every way it was distressing in the extreme. She feared it would give a mortal blow to the peace of her father, and would kill her mother.—To attempt rea-

soning with him on the subject, she believed was vain ; to supplicate appeared equally useless :—but at length it occurred to her, that though he could not be induced to relinquish his marriage, he might possibly be prevailed upon to delay, or conceal it, till the death of his parents ; and this she resolved to propose to him.

The night before his departure, he again sought a private conference with her, after supper, in the library.

When they met, he regarded her, a few moments, with an anxious inquisitive eye, as if he wished to penetrate her sentiments before she declared them ; and then asked, what had been the result of her deliberations ?

“ You did not expect,” answered Constantia, “ that I should cheerfully concur in your wishes : but I will promise to communicate them to my father and mother, without attempting to bias them in the smallest degree against them.”

“ Well—that is, perhaps, as much as I can desire from you at present ; and it is not a trifle : For, were you to express the repugnance, which, I dare say, you feel to my marriage, it might be sufficient to destroy any inclination they may have to gratify my wishes. Will you promise, then, to take the first opportunity, after my departure, to inform them of my design ?”

“ Do you mean that I should speak of it as a fixed resolution, or only as a measure that you wish ?”

“ I mean, that you should speak of it, as a measure which I shall be extremely averse to take, without their consent ; but cannot be induced to abandon, as I am convinced it is necessary to my happiness.”

“ As I have no doubt you have thoroughly reflected on its consequences, it may, perhaps, be unnecessary for me to discuss the subject with you farther, than as it regards them ; but for their sakes, give me leave to ask a few questions.”

“ Proceed.”

“ As you tell me your situation is at present agreeable, could you not postpone your marriage during the life of my father and mother, since you must be sensible it will be extremely distressing to them?”

“ There is an objection to delay, which even you must think insuperable. I hope to have children, and it would be unpardonable cruelty to them, to postpone my marriage till after their birth.”

“ Marry privately then, and conceal your marriage while my father and mother live.”

“ That would not answer my views. My father is far from aged ; a healthy, temperate man of sixty-two may expect a long life ; but were it otherwise, it is of importance to Sally to be introduced into society by my father and mother. If they choose to countenance my wife, whatever she may be, the world will follow their example. My father has great influence with many classes of

people; he possesses a large fortune, which is enough; for a man of fortune, who is not a block-head or a coward, may do with impunity almost any thing he pleases;—but he has likewise other claims to consideration. Many persons are greatly obliged to him; others from his known generosity expect to be so; a few, perhaps, are disinterestedly attached to him; and all who know him, have a high opinion of his understanding and worth. His example therefore, will be considered as a rule of conduct to others, so that instead of waiting for his decease, I should anxiously seize the period of his life, to prosecute my design.”

“ And if he should positively refuse his consent, would you still persist in your intention !”

“ Undoubtedly, and should perhaps obtain more from his regard to his own interest, than from affection for me. He knows that I must inherit his estate, and represent his family, and he cannot be indifferent to the credit of so ancient and honourable a house as his. The

dignity of the family cannot be properly supported if my wife is not respected; and thus, when he knows that I am married, he will soon probably, become as anxious to varnish her defects, as I could be myself; but it would be much better if he could be reconciled to her before, than after marriage."

"If he is not before, I hardly expect he will after: he is steady when he is convinced he is right."

"I confess I should despair of bringing him to my purpose, did I not rest much hope on my mother's influence with him; and I expect that she will at first oppose, and soon after consent to my wishes. I have seen her so often weary or worry him into compliance with her humour, that I can hardly despair of gaining any point on which she sets her heart. He has long indeed, been sensible of the impropriety of yielding to her against his judgment, but it cannot be expected, that he will on every occasion oppose her effectually."

"I have little doubt that she will sacrifice her own feelings to yours."

“ She will be afraid of the censure of the world, but that is only to be feared for a while. Uncommon marriages are merely the wonder of a day; the circumstances of them are then forgotten and friends cease to think of them, if they find it convenient to do so; for on such occasions as on most others, people act more from inclination than principle. We daily see marriages pardoned that deserve forgiveness much less than mine; marriages for example, with women who have not only failed in chastity, but have betrayed their own husbands, or misled the husband of another; yet we cannot blame relations for pardoning the men, who marry such women;—they are often sufficiently sensible of the enormity, and suffer for it severely; but they know, that however *worthless* the character, the marriage cannot be dissolved, and feel it would be dreadful, to punish a man for life for a single act of imprudence. You very frequently indeed, hear relations condemned when they do not forgive the most unjustifiable marriages, merely because they cannot be remedied; and thus you see, Constantia, the excuse for lenity in such cases, springs

from the very nature of the marriage institution."

Constantia did not answer, and after a short pause, Ornvile proceeded. "That my father and mother's pride may however, fall easily, and their notions of decorum be satisfied, I should not object to their refusing to see my wife at first, provided they receive her after a decent time is allowed for resentment, in the usual style of such things."

"I cannot help thinking," replied Constantia, "that you would sooner obtain their consent, if you did not appear determined to act without it; and it will certainly be much less painful to them not to hear of your design at first as unalterable."

"I have considered the matter well, and am clear they ought not to be allowed any hope of effecting a change in my intentions, for it would only lead to useless altercation and inconvenient delay; besides, that inevitable distresses are always easiest submitted to."

“ I own I am so very much alarmed for what they may suffer, that I entreat you will permit the intelligence to be given them in the gentlest manner; I am persuaded it cannot injure your interest.”

“ To oblige you, I may cede this point, although I differ from you so much, that I had once thoughts of marrying without their knowledge, as the best way of settling the matter. On reflection, however, I feared it might aggravate their displeasure, and I would not unnecessarily give them cause of offence. Let them now then, hear of it at first, as my wish, and afterwards know it as my determination. But if I yield to your wishes in this particular, I shall expect the more consideration from you in others. I know I may depend on what you promise, and wish I could be equally secure of Mrs. Almoré's doing Sally no harm with my father and mother.”

“ You may be assured she will leave them to act as they think proper; you know she is not disposed to obtrude her opinions on others.”

“ On such an occasion, Mrs. Almorne’s silence will be as expressive as the most eloquent language. Have you consulted the sage monitrefs ?

“ I have.”

“ And what advice has she given you ?”

“ None ; she says I ought to be guided by my own judgment.”

“ Amazing generosity ! when she knows she has wove your mind of such a texture, that she may be perfectly certain of the result.”

“ You do her injustice. You have admitted the prejudices of the world are against you ;—that it is even proper I should be infected with them ; why then refuse her the credit she deserves in forbearing to strengthen my prejudices by admonitions, which she knows would have weight ?—So far is she from acting severely, that she desires me to tell you, she will, if agreeable to you take

upon herself the care of informing my father and mother, as it will be in her power to do it to more advantage than I can pretend to do."

"Well, it must be confessed there is a decent calmness in her proceedings; I have always allowed she would be a tolerable character for Utopia. On this occasion, I shall be very glad to profit from her friendship, for my father and mother, on whose account alone, I know she has made the offer; for so convinced am I of her disapprobation of my marriage, that I am certain, though they should receive Sally favourably, she never will."

"If it should be so, you cannot blame her, since it is plain that she will not be hurried away by feeling, but guided by judgment."

"But of what value is that cold-hearted prudence, which, in defiance of every softer feeling, rigidly adheres to stiff rules of conduct?"

"It is certainly of value, since it can lead

her to act impartially between you and my father. Although you were her enemy, yet if she undertakes your cause, you may be as certain of her doing you perfect justice, as if you were her dearest friend. Is not this true virtue?

“It is neither more nor less than madness.”

“Madness!”

“Yes;—but don’t be afraid for your oracle; there is no danger of her being confined. You are too young to know it, but there are many people apparently rational, whose conduct, in particular points, can only be accounted for by a vein of madness, and Mrs. Almorne is plainly one of them. Do you think her outrageous spirit of righteousness, and incessant labour for the good of others, can proceed from sound intellects?”

Constantia cast down her eyes in silence.

Ornville proceeded. “Can you fancy such a deviation from the ordinary course of

mankind, owing to any thing but a crack in the brain? On the death of her husband and children, she was in danger of melancholy madness, and flew for relief to deeds of charity, as other disappointed women turn devotees."

"My father tells me she was the very same character before the death of her husband, that she is now; though her generous deeds were necessarily more limited."

"That only shows her craziness was original, though it may have been strengthened by events. However, I do not wish to demolish entirely the pretty fabric of sublime virtue you have so long been worshipping. It must be confessed that Mrs. Almorne's whims are better than many peoples'; and I am myself an admirer of her, in some particulars. I give her great credit for her general lenity to the fallen part of her sex, and for her attachment to her husband; the offers she has rejected, do her honour, and are a just tribute of respect to the memory of such a man as Almorne."

“I have heard, Hastings, her attachment to her husband, termed romantic nonsense; and her goodness to the fallen part of her sex, censured as the encouragement of immorality. Are we not too apt to judge of people’s qualities as they affect ourselves?”

“That is a very profound remark, Miss Ornvile; however, let me see that you resemble Mrs. Almorne in the points most convenient for me, and I shall leave you to appreciate her other qualities, as you think proper. You say she is willing to undertake the office I designed for you?”

“She is.”

“Then I have only to request, the business may be expedited without any unnecessary delay; and that you will instantly write to me the event.”

“You may rely on my doing so.”

“’Tis well. I believe, Constantia, your intentions are always very good, and if upon

this occasion you show an inclination to oblige me, I shall only say you may depend upon my gratitude."

She assured him he might trust to her being faithful to her promises; and after he had repeatedly enjoined her to be speedy in the performance of them, they parted without farther conversation.

CHAPTER VI.



LADY Ornaville was so much delighted with her son's visit, that for some days after his departure, she could speak of nothing else. She dwelt on his expressions; exulted in the propriety of his behaviour, and declared that she believed he had only been led astray by dissipated companions, whom, as soon as he should completely abandon, his conduct would be faultless.

She indulged so much innocent joy in this reflection, unsuspecting of the misfortune that awaited her, that Mrs. Almorne thought it would be cruel, and found herself unable to destroy her satisfaction, till her mind was a little diverted to other objects.

As Mrs. Almorne knew that Sir John would

behave with firmness whatever he might feel, her intention was to inform him first, that he might, if he thought proper, communicate the intelligence to Lady Ormville; and, at any rate, be prepared to support her under it: but when she considered, that his distress might render him incapable of informing her, with all the caution that was requisite, she resolved to attempt it herself the first moment she could think favourable for the purpose.

But in what manner to do it, she was extremely at a loss. She knew it would afflict Lady Ormville so severely, that the utmost care should be employed to bring her to a tone of mind, that might, in some degree, lessen the shock: yet to do this without violating the integrity of her own character; to soften the blow, without appearing to recommend a conduct she must disapprove, seemed so difficult and painful a task, that she despaired of being able to accomplish it in the least degree to her own satisfaction.

The time she chose for the attempt, was one morning when a heavy rain gave little chance of interruption from visitors. Sir John was engaged in his library, Constantia employed in domestic concerns, and Mrs. Almorne being quietly seated with Lady Ornvile, began conversation with her by observing, that her son's health appeared to be much improved.

“Yes,” replied Lady Ornvile; “that seems to be one of the happy effects of his reformation.”

“Do you never wish to see him married, madam?” asked Mrs. Almorne; “domestic engagements might effectually prevent his relapsing into habits of dissipation.”

“They might; but I fear he will not think of marriage, till he is more advanced in life.”

“The indifferent health he has had of late, may induce him to think of it much sooner than he otherwise would.”

“ Would to heaven, I could think so ! but Hastings is very far from a marrying man ; there must be very strong temptations to induce him to think of it : few women would please him.”

“ He may have talked so, but few persons adhere to the resolutions they form respecting marriage : very frequently they act directly contrary to them.”

“ Yes, yes, they find it necessary to lower their demands in some points, but Hastings will be nice in every particular. How many marriages have I seen him laugh at, that I could not find an objection to ?— I know not where he could find a woman he would approve of.”

“ He is in a situation to dispense with many advantages that others may find necessary ; fortune, for example, should be no object to him.”

“ Yet, I have heard him say, that fortune was the only thing that could induce him to marry.”

“The want of it, however, could not be an obstacle to his marriage, if he chose to disregard it; neither should want of birth, as the woman he marries will rise to his rank.”

“True; but birth is, nevertheless, of much consequence; especially as people who want birth, want connections; and good connections are of great importance to happiness.”

“They are very desirable, but you would not think the want of them sufficient to prevent your son’s marrying a woman that he liked?”

“If she were otherwise a proper wife for him, I should not object to her, though she had no connections at all; but when people of fashion marry persons in private life, they generally find them connected with low persons, of whom they must be ashamed. It would make me extremely unhappy to see Hastings always blushing for his wife’s relations.”

“Fashionable people find an easy remedy

for this; they know nothing of relations, whom it is not convenient to remember.”

“ But can you, Madam, approve of that? I have often indeed, seen even mothers and sisters neglected, because they were inferior to their fine allies, but I was always shocked by such want of feeling. Some people may think it a less evil than the mortification of their vanity; but, thank heaven, Hastings is not a man to involve himself in such difficulties.”

“ There is no saying what difficulties a man will not encounter for the sake of a woman he is fond of. Marriage is a connection extremely difficult to make with perfect satisfaction, and great sacrifices must sometimes be made on that occasion, as on many others. I am convinced, the being happily married would be of the utmost importance to the welfare of your son.”

“ Nothing, certainly, could give me more pleasure; yet I hope he will choose prudently; indeed, my only fear is that he will not choose at all.”

“Of that fear, I may venture to relieve you, for I believe he thinks of marrying; but he may not choose a woman that is quite agreeable to you. You have indeed been so singularly fortunate in life, that it is hardly to be supposed you can continue perfectly happy in every particular.”

“You alarm me, Mrs. Almorne; you certainly know of some imprudent connection he has in view.”

“I do know of his being fond of a girl, whom you would not approve of for his wife; but you must reflect, that marriage may be the only means of preventing that dissipation, which might, in a short time, hurry him to the grave.”

“That is, indeed, a consideration which ought to moderate my demands; but tell me why you think I would not approve of the girl he is fond of? Who is she?—What is her name?”

“Cusliffe.”

“Cusliffe ;—that is a name of recent date ; but there are respectable people of the name.”

“She has none of the advantages we have been speaking of.”

“What ! none of them ! Tell me, I beseech you, all you know of her.”

“She is a farmer’s daughter.”

“My dear friend,” said Mrs. Almorne, penetrated with compassion at the alteration she saw in Lady Ornvill’s countenance, “I entreat you to let reflection on the numerous blessings you enjoy, enable you to bear this single trial in your lot with fortitude.”

Lady Ornvill made no answer, but sat in a fixed attitude, with a melancholy bewildered aspect.

In a few minutes, she said, “I am ashamed, Madam, that you should see me thus distressed ;—you will surely condemn me, since she must be another Pamela whom Hastings could thus stoop to marry.”

Mrs. Almorne, with as much command of her feelings as she could assume, assured her, in the kindest manner, that she was far from condemning her, and most sincerely sympathised in her concern, though she ardently wished that she would, for the sake of her family, as well as herself, make every effort in her power to support her distress.

“ You think, then, his marriage certain ? ”

“ It may never take place, but he wishes it. ”

“ If you do not disapprove his choice, I will be reconciled to it ; for though I cannot always agree with you in opinion, I am never so much satisfied with myself as when I do.—But your countenance changes ;—I fear you know more than you have told me, or you, who respect virtue more than any external advantages, could not appear so disturbed. ”

Mrs. Almorne could not immediately reply ;—Lady Orville anxiously entreated her to speak, and repeatedly conjured her to tell her all that she knew. ”

“There is a circumstance,” said Mrs. Almorne, “which I know not how to tell you.”

“What circumstance? You terrify me.”

“It will give you much pain.”

“Kill me at once, Madam,—my fears are insupportable.”

“She is his mistress.”

Lady Ornaville looked aghast for a minute, and then burst into a flood of tears.

When she had wept bitterly for some time, she turned to Mrs. Almorne, saying, “This is a blow I did not expect;—how was my proud heart humbled, by the idea of his marrying an innocent country girl!—but this—this is an evil I know not how to support; for he must either have been guilty of seduction, or she is unworthy to be his wife.”

Mrs. Almorne’s tears flowed with Lady

Ornville's, but she could make no attempt to console her ; she had said all that she could urge in mitigation of the affliction,—she could go no farther.

Lady Ornville asked, if Sir John was informed? adding, it could only be by her son's desire, that Mrs. Almorne could have given her such painful intelligence.

Mrs. Almorne answered, that she had not yet informed him.

“ Tell him then,” said Lady Ornville, “ before I see him ; I will retire,—my own chamber is the proper place for me ;—the light is painful,—every object is transformed.”

Mrs. Almorne accompanied her to her apartment, where she desired the light might be excluded, and laid herself on her bed, saying to Mrs. Almorne, she might truly tell Sir John that she was unable to sit up.

Mrs. Almorne sent for Constantia to at-

tend her, and then went to Sir John to complete the work she had undertaken.

To inform him, she found a much shorter, though not a less painful task. At the first word, he discerned she had disagreeable intelligence to communicate, and begged to know immediately what it was?

She replied, that she was afraid to tell him abruptly, what must afflict him excessively to know.

“After these words, Madam,” said Sir John, “you cannot easily tell me worse than fancy will suggest: every moment you are silent, aggravates my uneasiness.”

Finding it impossible to delay the communication with any advantage, she gave him simply and briefly the information his son wished him to receive.

He listened in silence with a countenance varying with emotion; and when she ceased speaking, fixed his eyes steadfastly on the

ground for some minutes. He then rose, and after walking two or three times across the room, resumed his seat, and thus addressed her.

“ I must know, Madam, more of this affair than you have told me. From my knowledge of my son’s character, I am persuaded he would not venture to propose such a daughter-in-law to me, without a previous determination to marry her, whether I chose it or not. I do not, therefore, consider myself as now called upon to resolve, whether I shall promote, or prevent his marriage ; but whether I shall receive her, or renounce him.—The alternative is a hard one ; and before I decide, it is necessary that I should be well apprised of the circumstances of the case. Can you tell me how she has become so interesting to him ? Did he seduce her, or has he been inveigled by art ? ”

“ He did not seduce her, and I imagine he has become so fond of her, from bad health keeping him much at home, and making

his comfort; in a great measure, dependent upon her."

"His design of marrying her, however, is extraordinary, for he is not a man to make sacrifices of vanity. Had he seduced her, I should have wished to befriend her whatever I might think of him; but now it requires singular merit in her, to make his proposing such a marriage pardonable. Did he give Constantia any particulars you have not mentioned to me?"

"None."

"I must be better informed, and shall make his sister write to him for such information as I desire. I know not if he will give it, but I shall hear what he has to say before I seek other means of intelligence; I must be slow in my decision, that I may be just.—Unfortunate man! will he never do any thing I can approve!"

Sir John rose, and walked quickly across the room; but on returning, asked Mrs. Almoré, if she had informed his wife?

She told him she had, and that she was greatly distressed.

“She is infinitely more to be pitied than I am,” returned he, “for it is long since I ceased to expect comfort in Hastings, though I was not prepared for such an event as this. —I must go to her; she will require all the consolation we can give.”

CHAPTER VII.

AT Sir John's desire, Constantia wrote to her brother to inform him, that however distressing his marriage with Sally Cusliffe might be to his father and mother, yet since he thought it necessary to his happiness, they were willing to sacrifice their inclinations to his, and receive her as his wife, provided it should appear, that her conduct before she lived with him, had been such as would not render this improper. It was therefore requisite that they should be fully informed of her history, which could alone enable them to form a just opinion of her, or of the consequences to be expected from the connection ; and desired that he would give them an account of her family, education, and former habits of life, and particularly by what means she had become his mistress.

To these inquiries, dictated by her father, Constantia added every information he could expect from herself, concluding the whole by hinting, that her father would probably seek some other channel of intelligence, if his answer did not appear sufficiently explicit.

While the answer to this letter was anxiously waited for, Sir John left nothing undone to soothe the mind of Lady Ornaville. His unremitting endeavours, aided by those of Mrs. Almorne, were not without effect, and the repugnance she felt at first to the idea of her son's marriage, diminished so far as sometimes to allow her to think of being reconciled to it, if the accounts they received of Sally proved very favourable.

Ornaville's answer was some days longer in coming than was expected ; which, by exciting his mother's fears for his health, softened her still more to his wishes ; but by Sir John his silence was interpreted as a proof of his inability to answer their inquiries to his satisfaction.

When a letter from him did arrive, it con-

tained a softened representation of the particulars he had given Frederic, omitting only her intercourse with the female from whom he received her; and to the whole was added high encomiums of her character and conduct since she had resided with him.

Constantia, to whom this letter was addressed, received it when alone, and delivered it privately to Mrs. Almorne, who, resolving to say nothing of it to Lady Ornaville, till Sir John was informed of its contents, carried it immediately to him.

He read it in much perturbation, and rising quickly, as soon as he had perused it, quitted the room abruptly without speaking.

Mrs. Almorne did not see him again, till they met at dinner; the traces of deep sorrow appeared on his face, and she observed that he did not eat, although he pretended to be busy with his knife and fork.

After dinner, when Lady Ornaville rose to withdraw, he gave Mrs. Almorne a hint

to follow him to his sitting-room, where, in a few minutes she went, and found him walking in much agitation with his son's letter in his hand.

“Before I read this letter, Madam,” said he, “it was not my intention to trust implicitly to its contents; I meant to seek from others, the information respecting Sally Cusliffe which it was necessary to obtain,—not merely because I suspected my son would endeavour to palliate her failings, but from the fear of his being himself deceived about her. He has, however, saved me the trouble of farther inquiry, for his own account is decisive. It seems a candid one, for which I should give him much credit, did I not fear her story is too well known to be concealed; and did he not also know, that I should not be satisfied with his information, if it were not perfectly explicit. He is well aware that on important occasions, I do not trust even the evidence of my own senses, but with the utmost caution, and am never influenced by partial testimony. On this occasion, however, his own is sufficient, and obliges me to declare that Sally

Cusliffe can never be admitted into my house.—I feel myself under the necessity of informing him, that if he marries her, he must relinquish me.—Be so kind as to carry his letter to my wife,—and console her if you can—I am unable.”

Such was the determination of Sir John, but such was far from being the resolution of Lady Ornaville on reading her son's letter. Inclosed in it, one had come from him to herself, fraught with every expression that could rouse the mother's tenderness in her bosom, or induce her to comply with his wishes ; and he concluded by pathetically deploring the separation, which must unavoidably take place between them, if she and his father refused to receive Sally Cusliffe as his wife.

Lady Ornaville was too fond of her son, and too much accustomed to yield to his wishes, to be inflexible to them after the perusal of this letter. Miserable as she was at the choice he had made, she was still more miserable at the idea of rendering him unhappy, and of being separated from him. His late visits had had all the effect upon her that he wished ;

she thought of them with delight, and could not bear the apprehension of being for ever deprived of his society. She persuaded herself, and after some days passed in deep affliction, she endeavoured to persuade her husband, that it would be less unhappy for them to consent to their son's marriage, than to risk the consequences that might ensue from opposing it.

Sir John heard her with much concern, and told her, he had no doubt, a little farther reflection would convince her, that, whatever mode of conduct might be least painful, it was their indispensable duty to refuse their consent to so improper a marriage

“It would be improper,” said Lady Orville, “to appear at first to consent to it, but may we not encourage Hastings to expect our forgiveness, if Sally continues to behave well? It is not to be supposed that your resentment will always last.”

“Were my conduct to be guided merely by feelings of affection or resentment,” re-

plied Sir John, “ an alteration in it might certainly be expected from time ; but when my reason tells me I should do wrong in receiving Sally Cusliffe as a daughter-in-law, I cannot indulge Hastings in the hope of it.”

“ Yet, if she is the amiable girl he represents her, I cannot help thinking you ought not to continue inflexible ; chastity is not the whole of virtue, and repentance may atone for almost any transgression.”

“ But how are we to be assured of her repentance ? Raised by a rich man from a degrading to a happy state, may she not endeavour to preserve it merely from self-interest ? Specious appearances are easily assumed, and it would require long time indeed, to convince me, that she was fit to be treated as a daughter by you.

“ That is very inconsistent with the indulgence you have shown to others in similar situations ; I have heard you speak of some kept mistresses as women of the first character.”

“ You have, but their cases were peculiar ; they were the innocent victims of cruel seduction, or led astray by the most trying occurrences, or unfortunate situations. Failure in chastity must always be deeply lamented, yet, it is the train of circumstances by which actions are influenced or accompanied, that chiefly determines their character.

“ As Sally was seduced, she has a claim to forgiveness according to your own mode of judging.”

“ Of her seduction we have very little proof, for it is not probable the resentment of her friends would have been great, had there been much excuse for her fall ; but admitting it were otherwise, what has been her conduct since ? Did she attempt to withdraw from her betrayer to a life of honest industry, or has she at any time sought to regain the path of Innocence ?—No ; her sole object has been to be the hireling of any man who could support her.—Chastity is an equivocal virtue ; it may *possibly* be lost without lessening much the merit of the individual, and is undoubtedly

preserved by many women, who have not the least pretensions to virtue in their hearts; but this much I believe is certain, that the woman who does not respect it, does not deserve to be respected."

"Sally was young and ignorant, when she left her family, but time and instruction may teach her the errors of her conduct."

"But can it restore to her the feeling of modesty, without which chastity is of little value."

"Though she has been unfortunately situated, it does not, therefore, follow that she is lost to modesty."

"It is but too probable that she can have none of the delicacy requisite in the companion of virtuous women. Can you suppose a girl, who has voluntarily been the mistress of men for whom she had no affection, possesses that modesty which is one of the most precious guards of chastity?—And can I think how carefully I have cherished, and how much

I have delighted in the purity of Constantia, without shrinking from the slightest idea of making her the companion of a licentious woman?"

"I own, Constantia would be an objection to Sally's residing at Ornvile, but not to her making short visits here occasionally till Constantia was married."

"Supposing she were married; are there no other person's daughters in the county to be regarded except your own? What, for example, would you do with Sir Robert Horn-don's?"

"Eliza Horn-don is only twelve, and before she comes into society, Sally's story would be so much forgotten, that no odium on account of it would attach itself to her."

"It is very possible that no odium might then attach itself either to her or to us from it; our pride might cease to suffer mortification from so low a connexion, and our virtue to be questioned for submitting to one so de-

bebasing; but my chief objections to it would still remain, which are the encouragement it might give to similar marriages; and the effect which the society of such women may have on the morals of others.

It was Lady Anson's earnest request to me on her death-bed, that I would be particularly careful with what women I permitted Constantia to associate; immodest women being, in her opinion, more dangerous to *young girls* than even libertine men; for few men were so depraved as to disregard in the company of virtuous women the respect due to virtue; but the society of women whose ideas were impure, though their conduct, in the eye of the world, might be correct, led imperceptibly to the worst consequences.

Mrs. Almorne has since told me that she agreed entirely in this opinion; and if she and Lady Anson could think thus of women of reputation, what may not be feared from the society of one, who has shown so little regard to chastity?"

"I am very sensible that such women may be dangerous companions, but we ought not

to judge of women rashly by appearances, for many are very faulty in their dress and manner, and even imprudent in their conduct, who mean nothing wrong."

"There is but one way in which immodest dresses should be interpreted; for I can have no confidence in the virtue of the women, who can lay aside the feelings of delicacy in conduct. Hastings thought me ridiculously fastidious in prohibiting Coustantia's intercourse with Mrs. Whitely on account of her dress; but had she not soon after an intrigue with Captain Delmore in the absence of her husband? Whitely received intelligence of it by an anonymous letter, which he wisely discredited, because, like you, he would not be rashly distrustful, though he might have read in the most legible characters in her dress, that her chastity was not to be trusted. Thoughtlessness may be an apology for some indiscretions, which a woman on reflection, will even wonder how she committed; but it can never be urged in excuse for the regular and deliberate result of her labours at the toilet. I should fear much less danger to Constantia

from being with many kept mistresses I have seen, than from associating with women, who choose to appear naked in public, while they pretend to be virtuous."

"I confess much care is requisite in the choice of companions for *young girls*."

"Is less care necessary for married women, whose errors may be far more fatal to the peace of families, than any single woman's can be? It is by purity of morals alone, that we can hope to preserve women from the licentiousness of the times. From the number of divorces it is plain how little the ties of marriage are a security for conjugal fidelity; we must not, therefore, expect it, by imposing fetters on the person, but by planting virtue in the heart; and this is not to be done by allowing men whenever they please, to bring women from the most debased class into the society of the innocent."

"But if among that class, a woman of amiable disposition should be found, who is entirely reformed, would you exclude her for ever from society?"

“ Undoubtedly not ; but when women have the misfortune to fall into certain situations, they ought not to be restored to society without extraordinary caution. Would you be willing to receive Sally Cusliffe, if you were told that she had voluntarily resided in a brothel ? ”

“ You cannot suppose it, since there, with all the evils of the worst prostitution, she must have been exposed to the society of the vilest of women.

“ Yet there are no where beings more worthy of compafsion, or less, perhaps, deserving of blame, than some of the unfortunate females who inhabit these houses.”

“ They may be truly objects of benevolence in private, but virtuous women can never think of them as companions.

“ Inquire, however, into their history, and you will find that Sally is far more blamable than many of them.—But by whatever means a woman becomes a prostitute, she loses her.

place in society; and it would not, afterwards, be years of chastity, or of fidelity to a husband, which may proceed from many causes, that would render her, in my opinion, a proper companion for my wife or daughter. It would require many uncommon qualities to entitle her to a place in respectable society;—but at all events, she certainly ought not to be restored to it, merely at the desire of a man, who happens to become fond of her.”

“But if he marries her, you must allow it makes a difference.”

“Yes; she takes his name, and a name is to be substituted for virtue!—Were I to relax my principles in this particular, it would not be to oblige Hastings, but in pity to some of the women, whom such men as he have led astray. Have we not known several amiable women driven from society by a single failure in chastity?—Their fate is truly deplorable, yet you would not choose by forgiving their error, to allow others to regard want of chastity as a venial failing;—and shall we, to gratify the passions of our son,

grant what we refuse to humanity,—to misguided virtue.”

Sir John paused, but Lady Ornaville made no reply, and he proceeded. “Men have imposed chastity as a duty upon women, and no man would be a more rigid exacter of this law in a sister or a daughter, than your son ; he has no scruples about its justice,—but when it suits his own convenience, he is very willing to relax his severity with respect to it. Not content with the almost unbounded liberty, which men command of indulging their passions, he would, for the complete gratification of his own, deprive women of one of the greatest consolations they can have in sustaining the difficult part they have to act. The respect paid to virtue, is one of its chief supports ; and can those women, who are victims to their husbands’ vices, without deviating from the strict line of duty, see without pain, such women as Sally Cusliffe placed on a level with themselves,—made even superior to many of them in rank and fortune ?—Your sex, Madam, have much to complain of. How many of them are cruelly seduced, without

their betrayers being worse received in society?—What a fate has Mrs. Wilton had? Her friend seduced by her husband, while in her house, and under her protection, and when insulted and irritated by his conduct, she was betrayed by the seductive arts of another man, he obtained a divorce, which reduced her to poverty and wretchedness, while he continues to enjoy a distinguished place in society.”

“ I have always pitied Mrs. Wilton so much, that I should be glad it were in my power to befriend her; and should even visit her, were I authorized to do it by the example of others.”

“ Example is too often the guide of conduct. If your visiting Mrs. Wilton is right, you should do it, whatever others do; if wrong, no example should influence you.”

“ I cannot think so; many circumstances may render it hazardous for a person to act alone on particular occasions: besides, we cannot always have such confidence in our

own judgment, as not to be influenced by the opinions of others ; we must often do as the world does."

" I admit that the example of others may sometimes be necessary to support you in doing what is right, but should never have the smallest effect in inducing you to do what you think wrong. What is called the world, is little to be trusted as a guide. The situation of Lady Anrose, and Lady Derma, is a proof of this. The former, when only fifteen or sixteen, was married against her inclination, by the command of her father. Her husband knew this, but gave himself no trouble to soften the misfortune to her. After a few years, she left him, and no just person, who knew the conduct of her husband, could blame her. Soon after, she met with Lord Anrose, and they became attached to each other. She then wished to obtain a divorce, but that was impossible. She resolved, notwithstanding, to unite her fate to Lord Anrose's ; upon which, her husband sued for a divorce ; obtained it, and immediately after, she married Anrose. Since that

time, a period of nine or ten years, her conduct has been most exemplary as a wife, a mother, and in every line of female duty. She is a woman of the most amiable manners, and possesses a very superior understanding, with great taste for the fine arts. Her acquaintance speak of her in the highest terms of admiration; yet she is not visited by her country neighbours, from their disapprobation of her past conduct.

The life of her neighbour, Lady Derma, has been marked by various stains, and she has not, in any respect, the merit of Lady Anrose; but she has been visited by several families in her neighbourhood, because her husband's election interest was of consequence to them.

Several of their neighbours, who are persons of the first respectability, have visited neither; but I cannot help thinking their conduct to Lady Anrose extremely mistaken; and far, *very far* from serving the cause of morality, as it may lead women to believe that when they once deviate from the strict line of duty, even under the most palliating

circumstances, no good qualities, or future rectitude of conduct can avail.

The situation however of Lady Anrose, and Lady Derma, is a sufficient proof how cautious you should be of regulating your conduct by the example of others. But example has certainly a most extensive influence in society ; and in this single view, your conduct to Sally Cusliffe is of the utmost importance. If you choose to receive her, many will do the same merely to oblige you ; while others, ignorant of her story, would associate with her without any scruple, if sanctioned by you. Thus she might become the companion of numbers, who would not have the advantage of knowing that she ought to be treated with caution and reserve."

" But surely one girl can have it little in her power to do mischief ; we cannot suppose the influence of an individual can go far in a county like this."

" I am of a very different opinion ; I think it impossible to say how far, or in how many

ways the influence of an individual may extend. Besides, how do you know that Sally would remain the only woman in the county, who under the same circumstances was admitted into society? If you receive your son's mistress into your house, can you justly refuse admittance to your friends? Might not every mother in the county, plead the example of Lady Orville for acting in a similar manner? and where would the mischief end, or how would the line between vice and virtue be drawn?—The liberties men are allowed, are pernicious and immoral; and the *very* wide distinction they choose to establish between the conduct they permit to themselves, and that to which they restrict women, is I own highly unjust. The state of society with regard to women demands important alteration;—licentiousness in either sex should be equally the object of reproach and condemnation; yet in the present corrupt state of mankind, we must be extremely cautious how we venture to alter (at least by relaxation) the unjust inequality between the sexes, lest we only give greater freedom to vice.

In fine, Madam, from every view I can

take of the subject, I am convinced that I should do morally wrong in receiving Sally Cusliffe as a daughter-in-law; and you must forgive my saying, that I desire you will never propose it to me again."

Lady Orville gave no answer but a deep sigh;—a melancholy silence ensued, which was at length broken by her saying, "I must then lose my son!"

"No, Madam," replied Sir John: "you shall not be deprived of him, if he will consent to visit you without his wife. It was my intention to show my disapprobation of his marriage, by forbidding him to come here, but for your sake, I am willing to reverse this decision. I have often yielded my inclination to yours, because I thought it wrong that my will should be a law to you, in points which equally concerned us both; and it would be cruel to act otherwise now, when you require every consolation I can give.—God knows! I am myself, sufficiently unhappy! Whatever Hastings does, I cannot regard him with indifference. He was the

first pledge of our love;—in his infantine days, dearer to me than life:—and, though my satisfaction in him is gone, my affection is not destroyed. He is otherwise of consequence to me; for he must be the representative of my family, and inherit a fortune, which will give him much influence in society. The sorrow he gives me, is of a different nature from yours, but it is not less poignant.”

At these words, Sir John rose and walked about the room in such visible distress, that Lady Orville forgot her own sufferings, in anxiety to soften his. She expressed, at the same time, with much feeling, her sense of the tenderness and indulgence he had always shown her, and declared that if she should now desire to receive visits from her son contrary to his intention, it would only be in the hope that lenient behaviour might have a good effect on his general conduct.

CHAPTER VIII.



ALTHOUGH Lady Ornvile had lent an unwilling ear to Sir John's reasoning, she was not unaffected by it; and the belief that he acted in opposition to her wishes, only from a firm conviction that it was his duty, made her submit to his determination without a murmur.

She wrote herself to her son of his father's intention, and gave him the intelligence in the gentlest manner, adding every expression of kindness on her own part, that could soften it. She conjured him not to testify indifference to his father's approbation, by concluding his marriage quickly, but to show at least unwillingness to offend him, by delay. She intreated he would in the mean while come frequently to the Abbey, as she hoped their meetings would make their difference of sen-

timent less painful, if it did not bring them to coalesce in opinion; but at the same time assured him, that nothing should be said to him on the subject against his own inclination.

To this letter she very soon received an answer, in which he told her that he would certainly delay his marriage to oblige her, and likewise in the hope that time would render his father more favourable to it; but that he could not think of coming to Ornaville, as in the present temper of his father's mind their meeting could not be agreeable to either.

This letter calmed in some degree the distresses of Lady Ornaville, and enabled her, in the presence of her family, to assume some appearance of tranquillity, though sorrow preyed deeply on her heart. She had admitted the idea of Sally Cusliffe as a daughter-in-law, only as a sad alternative from a heavier evil; and there were times in which the thoughts of it were so shocking to her, that she scarcely knew whether the loss of her son, or his marriage would be the greatest misfortune.

Sir John pursued his accustomed avocations in his usual way, and no change appeared in him, except what was discernable in the gravity of his countenance; but from some meetings he had with his attorney, Mr. Edgeworth, Mrs. Almorne was led to imagine he was making an alteration in the destination of his property.

Her conjectures were soon confirmed by his telling her one morning, when Lady Orville and Constantia were taking an airing, that he had been adding a codicil to his will in favour of his wife and younger children.

“ Among the numerous hardships,” continued he, “ to which women are exposed, I have long thought a most severe one, the change of situation to which they are frequently subjected on becoming widows. There is nothing of which the human frame is more susceptible than local attachments; yet, the feelings of women are often in this respect, most unnecessarily and barbarously violated. How many have I seen in the full vigour of life, torn from houses that were endeared to them by every tie that could attach the human

heart, to make room for an heir, who behaved to them without the smallest consideration?—How many respectable women have thus been obliged to yield their place to *girls* they could not esteem, who treated them in the most contemptuous manner! Deprived at once of the object of their affection, their companion and protector; of his fortune, and the consequence it gave them; they are driven from their habitation to a new abode, where they seek in vain for the consolation, that scenes, to which they were attached, were capable of affording.—

Often as I have lamented this misfortune in the lot of women, I never thought of securing my own wife from it till now. Her love of family-consequence, and extreme attachment to her son, made me believe she would feel more pleasure in seeing him the possessor of Ornville Abbey than herself; especially as it is too large an habitation for a single woman, and on many accounts the proper residence for the heir of my fortune. Circumstances, however, are now changed. She can no longer have the comfort in her eldest son she expected, nor see without pain

the woman he has chosen, put in her place. Thirty years has she resided happily within these walls, and never shall be displaced by an unworthy successor. To her, I have given the possession of Ornaville Abbey while she lives; if she should resign it, her son must receive it as a favour,—not demand it as a right. This much is in my power; the Ornaville estate must be his, which is, perhaps, one cause, why he has always cared so little how he pleased me. The maternal fortune I inherited, is at my own disposal; much of it has already been spent on my sons, and not much will remain after the purposes of my Will are fulfilled.”

Upon saying this, Sir John put his Will into Mrs. Almorne's hands, and desired her to read it; which she did with sentiments of high admiration, which she very warmly expressed.

The esteem he felt for her, made her approbation at all times peculiarly gratifying, but on this occasion he said, he could not flatter himself with deserving the praise.

her expressions insinuated. “Those views, Madam,” continued he, “which you consider as so meritorious in my situation, are not the result of any singular merit in me, but merely the consequence of being born a younger brother. For that circumstance I have often thanked heaven ; it enabled me to take liberal views, and to seek happiness from sources that depended on myself. How often have I in early life, painfully and mistakingly contrasted my fate with my eldest brother’s, when tired and disgusted with the study of the law, I left the temple to visit him here ! I found him always engaged in his pleasures, or contriving the means of varying them to the highest advantage. He was a good man, but too much devoted to amusement, and vain of his family and fortune.

On one of those visits, I remember well, his consulting me about his marriage. He said he was anxious for an heir to his title and estate ; that he did not expect my situation would permit me to marry soon, and if we had no children, our name and fortune would be sunk in the family of a female relative ;—

but the great difficulty was where to find a woman worthy of the situation in which he would place her. She must, said my brother, not only be agreeable to me, but every way suited to maintain the dignity of my family. Ornaville Abbey is not in the ordinary style of places,—nor a fit habitation for ordinary people. Here is to be seen all that is grand and venerable of antiquity, with all the elegance of modern life. I must have a wife, whose character, understanding, and manners, are worthy of such an abode; and whose family will do no discredit to the long line of illustrious ancestors, whose pictures will perpetually remind her of the honourable alliance she has made.—I think I still see the happy look of self-complacency, with which he cast his eyes round the room as he said this.—What would be his feelings now, were he alive to see the woman, whom the heir of his family has chosen to be the mistress of Ornaville Abbey!"

"I believe," said Mrs. Almoré, after a pause, "your brother was never married?"

"Never; the woman he thought proper to

ask at the time I am speaking of, refused him; my marriage soon after made him more indifferent about his own,—he became fond of his bottle, injured his constitution by it, and died suddenly by drinking a glass of cold water, when he was over-heated by a fox chase.”

“He was ruined by the advantages for which you sighed.”

“He was. No man can be happy whose sole employment is the enjoyment of wealth. I have often rejoiced when thinking of Valmonsor, that he was a stranger to its seducing influence; he has probably been the wiser, and the better for it, and will now truly know how to value and enjoy the advantages of fortune.”

“Anxiety about Valmonsor,” said Mrs. Almorne, “has determined me to go to town in a day or two, if there is nothing in the state of Mr. Anson to render my visit improper. I have written to Frederic to inquire how he does, and if his answer, which I expect to-

morrow, is at all favourable, I shall instantly depart ; I have delayed my journey so long only on account of Lady Orville."

" I think you may now leave her as easily as you could expect to do for some time, and I shall rejoice if you can go immediately, for I become daily, if possible, more anxious about our dear girl, because she appears more and more deserving of my care : since her return from Delvin Lodge, no one could imagine she had a concern in the world, but her father and mother."

" Nor do I believe," said Mrs. Almoré, " that in your presence she has a thought of herself. Her sense of duty is so strong, that I am persuaded she would act as she does, though her feelings were less interested ; but your happiness is really the first object of her care, and all consideration of herself is lost in anxiety for you."

" Could I see her happy," replied Sir John, with a sigh, " I should die content."

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Mrs. Almorne wrote to Frederic to inquire about Mr. Anson, she informed him of the state of his father and mother, as the cause of her unwillingness to leave them without being previously assured that she should not be disappointed in the object of her journey to town.

In his answer, he told her that Mr. Anson was so much recovered, that Sir Esmond had intended writing to her immediately to request the favour of a visit from her as soon as possible, as they most anxiously wished to see her; and in order that she might leave Orville the more easily, he intended, in consequence of the information she had given him of his father and mother, to be with them during her

absence, and would, probably, be at the Abbey the day after the arrival of his letter.

This intelligence gave much satisfaction to the family. Mrs. Almorne and Sir John rejoiced that her journey would no longer be delayed, and all were pleased with the prospect of Frederic's visit, and gratified by the kind motive of it.

Mrs. Almorne had intended to leave Ornaville as soon as she received his letter if it proved favourable, but on reading it, she postponed her departure for a few hours, and desired Constantia to accompany her to her apartment, where she thus spoke to her :

“ You know, my dear, how reluctantly I leave you at present, when you have so much cause to be unhappy, and will, therefore, easily imagine the pain I must suffer in feeling myself compelled before our separation, to add to your distresses by informing you of some unhappy circumstances in the situation of your brother Frederic, Be not, however, too much alarmed, for the misfortune which

threatens him may be averted ; but since he is to be here, I think it necessary to inform you of it, as I am persuaded he will speak to you of his affairs, and it may be better for you both that you are previously acquainted with them.

Soon after he was here in September, he wrote me a long letter, the particulars of which I shall briefly state. He informed me that his marriage, which had never been a happy one, had become nearly the reverse both to him and his wife before she left England ; and that since her departure it had grown almost insupportable from his attachment to another woman, who regarded him with equal affection. Under these circumstances it was impossible not to wish that his separation from Mrs. Orville should continue ; but he could not help wishing also to get his marriage annulled ; and believed, from the manner in which it had taken place, it was in his power to do so. He said he thought himself perfectly at liberty to dissolve it, as he had been drawn into it by the artifice of Mrs. Orville's relations, and since it had failed to make her happy for whom he had been sacrificed, he

did not see why he should continue the victim of it for life ; that she might be happier separated from him than she had ever been with him, while he would be blessed with the woman that was in possession of his affections, who was so very amiable, that he ought to annul his marriage for the sake of her peace, as well as his own. He declared, however, that his conduct should be regulated by my wishes ; that it was I who had prevented his becoming a wretched exile bereft of every comfort of life, and that even though his obligations to me were less, his respect for me was such as convinced him he ought to trust to my decision rather than his own. But he flattered himself, I should think his design justified by his situation, as soon as I was made fully acquainted with it, and regretted I could not be so on the first discovery of his intention. It could not, however, be communicated by letter, and he had not courage to give me the first intimation of his wishes in person, nor would venture to wait upon me at all, till I gave him permission.

He said many other things, which I forbear to relate, as he will tell you them him-

self, and I am in haste to mention others of which he cannot inform you.

No occurrence of my life ever surprised or perplexed me more than this letter. His marriage was so very imprudent, that it was supposed to be the effect of violent passion; and though I had never marked it for a happy one, I did not suspect it was the reverse. Had I even known it to be so, I could not have imagined he would think of annulling it, both from the uncommon excellence of his character, and his remarkable affection for his children. I was persuaded very peculiar circumstances must have led him to think of it, and lamented his situation, however much I disapproved his design.

About the answer I was to give I had no hesitation. Had I not laid him under pecuniary obligations, his case was one of the few, which could have induced me to deviate from my general rule not to interfere in the important concerns of others; but that circumstance made me think it improper to use the influence I might have over him. Pecuniary favours cannot be managed with too much delicacy; not because they are by any means

the greatest that can be conferred, but from prejudice having given them a value which they seldom deserve.

I wrote to him, that I was extremely sorry he should think any services I had been so fortunate as to render him, entitled me to be the arbiter of his fate; that I should be very far from attempting to govern his conduct in so momentous a concern as the one he referred to me, farther than to request he would not take any step in the prosecution of his design for three months, in order that himself, as well as I, might have the satisfaction of knowing he did nothing rashly. That period he would necessarily devote to deliberation; and if, at the expiration of it, he still adhered to his design, I should be happy to see him at Delvin Lodge, to be made acquainted with any particulars of his situation he wished me to know, and in the mean time requested he would inform me of the name and residence of the lady who had engaged his affection.

His answer was extremely satisfactory. He said, however painful a state of suspense might be, he would certainly postpone his design till the period I desired; and, if he

should then discover I disapproved of it, even though I did not say so, he believed it would be impossible for him to act in opposition to my wishes, but he would venture to hope it would not be difficult for me to concur in his. The name of the lady who was so interesting to him, he said, was Alderton, and she resided in town with her mother, who was the widow of a merchant that had been a valued friend of his partner Mr. Hanway. Respect to the memory of Mr. Alderton had induced Mr. Hanway to take his only son as a clerk into the house, and that by means of young Alderton he had become acquainted with his sister.

It had struck me as extraordinary, that Frederic, a married man, should be assured of a return of affection from a woman who knew him to be so. I was most unwilling to suppose him capable of endeavouring to gain the affection of any woman improperly; and therefore, their mutual affection being known to each other, required an explanation to justify the conduct of both. I could not expect an impartial account of her from him,

and inquired her name, in the hope of hearing of her by other means.

No person could have been more eligible for this purpose than Hanway. He is a man of whom I have the highest opinion; and I have been so happy as to serve him essentially; which led to his taking Frederic as a partner into his house, for whom he now entertains the sincerest friendship.

I wrote to him immediately to request that he would give me all the information he could about the Alderton family; adding, that the motive of my request was strong, but secret, and therefore begged he would not mention to any one the inquiry I had made.

His answer gave me ample information. He said he was at no loss to guess the motive of my inquiry, as he was not a stranger to his friend Orville's attachment to Miss Alderton, nor to his having written to me upon the subject. He said that Frederic had lately given him the history of his acquaintance with her, which, joined to circumstances he was otherwise informed of, enabled him to give me all the intelligence I could desire.

Her father was a worthy man, who died a

few years ago, leaving his family very indifferently provided for. His widow was a mean selfish character, with a great deal of sagacity and cunning; his son an open, gentle, simple youth, and his daughter a woman about twenty-eight, of an artful disposition, with very insinuating manners.

In consequence of an illness of young Alderton's, which confined him to his mother's house, Frederic became acquainted with Mrs. Alderton and her daughter. Upon his going two or three times to inquire after the young man, they behaved to him with the greatest politeness, and spoke in such terms of the high satisfaction Alderton received from his visits, that Frederic was led, from good nature and civility, to repeat them oftener than he would otherwise have done.

Whenever he went, they took extraordinary pains to ingratiate themselves into his favour; and Mrs. Alderton declared he bore so striking a resemblance to a son she had lost, that she could not help regarding him with maternal tenderness, and feeling the most soothing satisfaction in his presence.

Frederic was thus led, by various artifices,

to visit them frequently, till, at length, he began to fear the society of Miss Alderton was more agreeable than was safe for his peace.

The moment he made this discovery, he discontinued his visits, till repeated messages from Mrs. Alderton, by her son, made him think himself obliged to wait upon her. He found her alone, and she expressed the greatest satisfaction in seeing him again; adding, with an appearance of much concern, that his long absence had made her daughter and her very unhappy, lest they had inadvertently given him cause of displeasure, or been, by some strange accident, deprived of his good opinion; for, otherwise, they could not suppose he would so suddenly and totally have deserted them, when he knew that, in their retired state, his society was the first among the few pleasures they enjoyed.

Frederic assured her they had given him no cause of offence, and that his absence had not been in the least owing to any diminution of his regard and esteem for them. She replied, that she hoped he would show this, by favouring them with a visit as often as he

conveniently could; and as he could not assign the real cause of his absence, he thought himself obliged to promise the renewal of his visits.

He took care, however, to make them seldom, and much shorter than before; but a very few sufficed to bring matters to the point Mrs. Alderton wished. On his going to her house one evening, he found her alone, with a very dejected appearance. She told him she was extremely glad he happened to call at that time, as she wished to speak to him alone, and was going to repose in him an extraordinary degree of confidence, which nothing but the high opinion she entertained of him, and extreme anxiety for her daughter's happiness would have induced her to do.

After a little more preamble, and much appearance of distress, she proceeded to say that she had lately imagined one of the greatest deprivations she could suffer, was the loss of his society, but that she now found herself under the necessity of wishing his visits should be discontinued, as they had become fatal to the peace of her dear Nancy. She said he could easily believe how very painful it must be to

a mother to make such a confession; but after much deliberation, she saw no other way in which she could, with any propriety, put an end to the visits of a friend she valued so highly, and whose company she had so earnestly solicited.

Frederick's surprise and concern at this harangue were extreme; but he instantly assured her his visits should cease, and expressed the utmost regret for having been so unfortunate as to be the cause of any unhappiness to her or Miss Alderton.

She thanked him warmly for the concern he showed for her, but said she did not wish him to discontinue his visits entirely, as it would render Nancy still more unhappy, by leading her either to suspect the real cause of his absence, or to fancy another equally disagreeable; all she could therefore desire at present, was that he should come very seldom till some circumstance occurred, which might afford him a favourable opportunity for putting a total end to their intercourse.

He obeyed her injunctions, and went very rarely to her house; but his meetings with Miss Alderton now, affected him very differ-

ently from what they had formerly done. Knowledge of her affection, and pity for her unhappiness, had a powerful effect on a man of his amiable disposition, in strengthening his partiality; while the melancholy tenderness, which now pervaded her whole behaviour, rendered her so fascinating, that he resolved to give up seeing her entirely, as the only means of restoring either her peace or his own.

Two successive mornings he went to Mrs. Alderton's with the intention of informing her of his design, but she was not at home; although he was told the contrary till he was in the room with Miss Alderton.

She seemed plunged in the deepest melancholy, while her manner was in the highest degree affecting. He found much difficulty in concealing the effect she had upon him, and as soon as he left her, resolving to trust himself no more in her presence, he wrote to Mrs. Alderton that he would never return; being convinced that Miss Alderton's unfortunate attachment to him, would best be overcome by complete separation.

Mrs. Alderton wrote in reply that she was

so much of his opinion, that she had been contriving a plan for removing her daughter to the country in the course of a week or two; and requested he would in the interim call once or twice for a few minutes, as it would prevent any unpleasant apprehensions arising in the mind of Nancy before her departure.

This letter overcame Frederick's resolution. He thought he ought not to refuse Mrs. Alderton's request, and once more ventured to her house, where he was received by her alone.—She appeared overwhelmed with grief, and told him it arose from her daughter having positively refused to go into the country, declaring that nothing in the world should induce her to deprive herself of his society, which was the only comfort she had in life.

Frederick was so excessively disturbed by this avowal, that it was not difficult for Mrs. Alderton to bring him by degrees, to acknowledge his affection for her daughter. She then lamented their mutual attachment in the most pathetic terms, declaring she could not without the deepest regret, think that two amiable people thus united by the most tender affection, and formed to make each other

happy, should be for ever separated. It was the more to be deplored, as she confessed she had heard he was unfortunate in his marriage, and lamented that the law did not permit the dissolution of marriages, when they could only continue for the misery of the parties.

Impressed by these observations, and distracted [by love and grief, Frederick acknowledged his marriage was invalid, and by her encouragement came to the resolution, before he left her, of having it annulled.

But on returning home, where every thing he saw reminded him of his wife and children, his resolution began to waver. Pity for them took possession of his breast;—fear of the affliction he would bring upon his father and mother, rose to his view; the disapprobation he must expect from them, and from all his friends, with a long train of heavy distresses, which must be the consequence of his design, floated in his imagination, and rendered him the prey of the most conflicting emotions.

After a sleepless night, he rose without having come to any resolution except that of desiring Mrs. Alderton not to mention his in-

tentions to her daughter till he had deliberated upon them farther.

With this design he went early to Mrs. Alderton's, and desired to see her alone, when he immediately informed her of the purpose of his visit.

She told him he came too late; that knowing how very miserable Nancy was, she had not been able to refrain from telling her there was a possibility of her being saved from endless affliction; and though she would not, if he repented his design, oppose his inclination, yet she could not think of being the person to destroy the hopes she had raised in her daughter, and requested he would do it himself.

Without giving him time to reply, she left the room; and while he hesitated a moment what he ought to do, Miss Alderton entered.

He now found himself compelled to speak on the subject to her, and acknowledged the affliction which had led him the day before to propose annulling his marriage; while he confessed the obstacles that on farther reflection appeared to oppose it.

She listened with composure to all that he said, but as soon as he ceased speaking, wept excessively. She told him, as well as grief would permit, that she was afraid her mother's parental tenderness had carried her farther than she ought to have gone; that she herself had felt the utmost repugnance to the idea of dissolving his marriage, as she was aware of the objections which could be made to it: but her mother had opposed her on the ground of its being a very mistaken opinion, that mere respect to a ceremony should have the power of rendering three persons miserable for life. That marriage was an institution intended to promote the happiness of mankind, and should not be a means of producing the contrary effect.

For her own part, Miss Alderton said, she could not pretend to be a casuist, and had only admitted the idea of annulling his marriage, under the impression that it would be fortunate both for him and his wife. If he now thought otherwise, she would be the last person to desire it:—she had been for some time accustomed to think herself doomed to affliction, and loved him too well to

fancy her unhappiness could be lessened by any measure which could endanger his peace.

Frederic was not proof against her generosity, her tears, and tender expressions; he loved her passionately, and could not see her the victim of sorrow, of which he was the cause, without the utmost commiseration; —he forgot every thing but the restoration of her tranquillity, and left her with a full determination to annul his marriage.

He went directly to Mr. Hanway to inform him of his design; for, though his resolution was taken, he was anxious to have his friend's opinion; and far from wishing to conceal any part of his conduct, he detailed to him minutely the particulars I have related.

Mr. Hanway saw he was too much under the influence of Miss Alderton at the moment, to be reasoned with successfully, and therefore declined giving him any opinion on the subject for a day or two, when he promised to canvass it with him fully, and urged him to consider it himself in the mean time as dispassionately as possible.

Upon hearing Frederic's story, Hanway recollected, that one morning when he called at Mrs. Alderton's, during the illness of her son, she had in a very inquisitive manner, put several questions to him about Frederic's marriage, which, though they surprised him at the time, he attributed merely to idle curiosity. They now recurred to his memory, and aided by his knowledge of her character and her daughter's, infused a suspicion into his mind, of their conduct having been a deep laid scheme to ensnare Frederic, from their having, some how or other, been made acquainted with the invalidity of his marriage.

To know if his conjectures were right, he made several inquiries, in a cautious way, of young Alderton, by which he discovered that he was well acquainted with Frederic's domestic situation, and had informed his mother and sister of it the first day they saw him.

Alderton was often in Frederic's house, and happened one day to overhear a dispute between him and Mrs. Ornvile, which terminated in her saying she supposed he wished to separate from her, by his neglecting to

get the ceremony of their marriage legally performed; to which Frederic replied, that he had objected to it only from fearing it would expose the legitimacy of their sons to a doubt, which otherwise might never be questioned.

On receiving this intelligence, Mr. Hanway's suspicions of the female Alderton's were fully confirmed, and he had hardly a doubt that they had acted solely from interested motives. It was easy indeed to suppose that Frederic's handsome appearance, and agreeable manners, might have captivated Miss Alderton; but, as her mother's extraordinary attentions to him had commenced at the very beginning of their acquaintance, it was more probable that the conduct of both had been excited by his rank and fortune, which were greatly superior to any thing Miss Alderton's obscure situation could give her the least chance of obtaining; while the amiableness of his character, and his domestic unhappiness, might easily inspire the hope of making him the prey of their ambition.

Full of the discovery he had made, Hanway went immediately to Frederic with the

intention of undeceiving him about the characters of his favourite and her mother; but the very first hint of a reflection on either, was so ungraciously received, that Hanway saw it would be prudent to be slow in his communications, if he did not wish them to be mistaken for unjust suspicions; since unfortunately he could not bring forward such facts in support of his opinions, as to the eye of prejudice would appear incontestible. He desisted, therefore, from saying what he had intended, and assailed Frederic on a point in which he was more vulnerable; the interest of his wife and children. On this subject, it was easy to impress him strongly; and Hanway hoped he had represented what they might suffer, in such a manner as would induce him to abandon his design; but another meeting with Miss Alderton disappointed this hope, and left Mr. Hanway irresolute how to act, when he was in some measure relieved by Frederic's telling him that he was determined to be guided by me.

On the perusal of Mr. Hanway's letter, I was extremely distressed at your brother's being the dupe of such women; but on re-

fection, I was happy they were so unworthy, as it might be the easier to undeceive him, and would soften the disappointment he must suffer. His plan can never take place, however he may expect it while under the immediate influence of Miss Alderton, and absent from his family; but it is a measure too fatal to his children, too distressful to his friends, and too improper in every point of view, to be persisted in by so amiable a man."

"But if he even make the attempt," said Constantia, "it will kill his wife, and break the hearts of his father and mother. Whatever way he acts, his peace of mind seems gone for ever."

"It might be so if Miss Alderton were more amiable; but when he is undeceived about her, he will return with satisfaction to his family. His wife is good, though she may have been imprudent, and her errors will be corrected."

"She is truly good: I cannot imagine how they have been so unhappy."

“ I shall consult Mr. Hanway what can be done for them, and happily Frederic has time for reflection.”

“ And for this we are indebted to you! Often have you told me that the consequences of our actions were infinite, and now I have a proof of it; your generous kindness to him has saved us all from misery. What obligations do you not daily lay us under !”

“ Talk not of obligation, my love; you would not speak of obliging yourself, and are you not to me more than myself? In the language of true friendship, the word obligation is unknown. Be careful of yourself, and those who are dear to you, and I trust we shall soon meet again happier than we part.”

CHAPTER X.

SOON after Mrs. Almorne left Ornvile, Frederic arrived. His presence was balm to the wounded feelings of his father and mother. Sir John had always loved him with uncommon affection; and though his indiscretions had given him pain, they had never injured him in his esteem, and he now viewed him as the son on whom he was to lean for comfort to himself, and credit to his family.

The goodness of Frederic's disposition, the mildness of his manners, and rectitude of his intentions, justified his father's partiality, and rendered it almost impossible for any person to regard him with indifference.

The unwearied exertions he now made to

engage the attention, and support the spirits of his father and mother, while his own heart was torn by contending emotions, increased Constantia's esteem for his character, and sorrow for his misfortunes; and she endeavoured by every affectionate attention and act of kindness in her power, to conduce to his comfort.

After he had been a few days at the Abbey, one morning when Lady Ornaville was engaged with a friend, and Sir John busy writing, he came into Constantia's apartment, where she was employed with her needle; and sitting down by her, with a look of much anxiety and great embarrassment, he asked if Mrs. Almorne had informed her of the correspondence she had lately had with him?

Constantia answered, she had informed her of it only the day of her departure, upon learning that he was coming to Ornaville.

"I cannot be surprised," returned he, "that she should have been unwilling to speak of it sooner, for she probably thinks more

unfavourably of my intentions, than they deserve; but, when she is fully acquainted with my situation, I flatter myself we shall not differ in opinion.—My case is a very unfortunate one;—I am but too sensible that which ever way I act, I must be unhappy; I have but a choice of evils in my power, and it remains to be decided which are the least.”

“ Would to heaven!” said Constantia, “ that I could guide you to peace.”

“ You will guide me at least to what is right;—to peace, I fear, I shall ever be a stranger.—I have hitherto, Constantia, concealed from all my friends, the circumstances that preceded, and followed my marriage; the disclosure could do no good, and might have done harm: nothing, indeed, but the peculiar situation in which I am involved, could tempt me to divulge them; but if you will have patience to listen to my story, I will give it you simply as it was,—‘ nothing extenuate, nor set down ought in malice.’ ”

“How, my dear Frederic, do you think I can want patience where you are concerned?”

“Know then, that I first saw my wife at her aunt, Mrs. Woodhouse’s, where she resided with her brother. My acquaintance with Ormesby was very accidental; and as he was much older than myself, and from his clerical profession very different in habits and pursuits, I should never have formed any connexion with him, had he not courted me with the most unwearied assiduity. He professed much regard for me, and being very amusing, I soon found great pleasure in his society.

When our friendship had a little advanced, he invited me to dine at Mrs. Woodhouse’s, where I found a most agreeable party. He introduced me to his aunt and sister in very flattering terms, and the former treated me with great politeness, and gave me an invitation to come to her house as often as it should be agreeable to me.

Ormesby, soon after, invited me to several small, but select parties, and seldom met me

accidentally without pressing me to go home with him in so friendly a way, that it was difficult to refuse. Mrs. Woodhouse was sensible, cheerful, and well-bred; and Ormesby himself so entertaining, that my time passed with such pleasure in their society, as induced me at length to go often voluntarily to Mrs. Woodhouse's, at the hours I expected to find him with his family. In this I was frequently disappointed, either by his being from home, or called away while I was there; but on such occasions his aunt and Lydia showed so much anxiety to compensate for his absence, that I could not regret the time I spent with them, and sometimes passed half an hour not disagreeably with the latter alone.

This did not arise from admiration of her beauty, which did not affect me; for though, on the first view, she appeared strikingly handsome, her face was so devoid of expression, and her manner so perfectly insipid, that had she not been the sister of my friend, I should never have looked at her twice. On farther acquaintance, however, the insipidity of her behaviour appeared to be in a great measure owing to extreme diffidence, which

made me desirous to encourage her, as I thought her disposition amiable, and felt grateful for the solicitude she showed to entertain me.

I should, notwithstanding, have found the time I passed with her alone excessively tiresome, had I not been kept in constant expectation of seeing her brother appear, for he seldom left me without saying he hoped to return quickly, which he sometimes did.

My visits had not continued long, before I began to suspect I was regarded by Lydia with more kindness than was merely due to the friend of her brother. As I had never shown her any particular attention, I was flattered by her partiality, which was betrayed in a very artless manner. I was careful, however, that no part of my behaviour should lead her to expect a return of affection, and, satisfied with myself in this respect, did not think it necessary to avoid her society,—on the contrary, I yielded without scruple to the gratification I could not help feeling in being tenderly beloved.

This conduct was wrong, and I was soon deservedly punished for it. Her affection in-

creased ; she grew melancholy, and I considered myself as the cause. I now determined on a change of conduct, and for some time gave up going to her aunt's. Her brother called on me frequently to reproach me kindly for my absence, and one day entreated I would visit him in an evening as often as my engagements would permit, as he never stood so much in need of the society of a friend. His sister, he said, had ailments which threatened a consumption, but unfortunately did not think herself ill, and would not be prevailed on to take care of herself. He added, that her indifference to life was astonishing at her age ; —that he feared she would die, and he should be distracted at the loss of her, as she was one of the most amiable girls in the world.

This intelligence rendered me extremely unhappy. I reflected on my conduct as cruel to her, and ungrateful to him. He had with the utmost kindness endeavoured to make me happy in his house, and I had returned his friendship by destroying his peace. I had not, indeed, courted the affection of his sister, but I had allowed it to strengthen by indulgence ; I had even put it out of her power

to overcome it, by going often to the only place where it was impossible she could avoid me. When too late, I became sensible, that the trifling even so far with the peace of an innocent girl was villanous.

Oppressed with these reflections, I went to Mrs. Woodhouse's with the intention of persuading Lydia to take care of her health. I found her extremely dejected, but not otherwise apparently ill, and she assured me she did not think she had any ailment whatever, though at the same time she confessed that she was indifferent about her health. I did not choose to mention her brother's fears, lest they should alarm her, but her want of apprehension did not make me think her the less in danger, and I endeavoured to prevail upon her to be careful of herself.

A week after, her brother called upon me, and told me he was preparing himself to resign her, as the melancholy into which she had fallen, whether the cause or effect of bad health, would infallibly destroy her. I could not hear this without increasing unhappiness, which, the next day, carried me with extreme anxiety to Mrs. Woodhouse's, to urge Lydia still more earnestly than I had done before,

to those attentions to herself, which I believed necessary to her preservation.

She did not hear without emotion, my expressions of concern for her welfare, nor my anxious solicitations that she would be attentive to her health; her whole frame appeared agitated, and the melancholy sweetness of her behaviour, was so interesting,—that, in fine, in a moment of tenderness on her part, and extreme pity on mine, I offered her my hand.

The timid joy with which she heard my proposal,—the tender avowal of her affection it produced, and the misery it completely banished, made me at first ample amends for the sacrifice I had made,—for at the very moment I made the offer, I felt it a sacrifice. The die was however cast,—I had no alternative, and I resolved to marry her privately, as I did not suppose my father would consent to our marriage, and I thought it better to marry without his knowledge, than against his inclination. But I was far from being determined when our union should take place; I wished it to be delayed a year or two from prudential motives, which I mentioned to Lydia, and

desired her to communicate them to her brother, when she told him of the engagement we had made.

The moment he heard of it, he came to me, in the utmost concern, to remonstrate against my design. He said he had too much regard for me, to consent to a measure so injurious to my interest ; though, otherwise, he confessed, it was the event in the world that would give him the most satisfaction. He lamented the acknowledgments which Lydia had made to me ; but whatever might be the consequence of disappointment to her, he could never agree to our marriage ; and earnestly entreated me to consider how many beautiful and accomplished women of fortune I might have in my choice, when the period that would be proper for my marrying should arrive.

I thanked him warmly for his disinterested friendship ; but said, that since he had no objection to our union, except what arose from generous concern for me, it should certainly take place.

He replied, that if I was not to be opposed successfully by argument, he should think it

his duty to frustrate my intention by other means ; that he would send Lydia to a distant part of the country, and had no doubt absence would soon destroy that partiality which so fatally blinded me to my interest ; and if I should attempt to correspond with her, he would make my father and mother acquainted with my design, who would undoubtedly throw obstacles in the way of it, which it would be impossible to overcome.

The extreme generosity of this behaviour impressed me with the highest admiration, but confirmed, instead of weakening my resolution, as it made me more than ever interested, that so generous a friend should not be a sufferer by me.

His threats, however, induced me to make an alteration in my plans. I believed that he would send his sister to the country, which, as it was the most inclement season of the year, would be sufficient to kill her ; I believed also, that he would discover my intentions to my family, which would be the source of endless vexation : and, to remedy these evils, no way appeared so easy or proper, as an elopement to Gretna Green.

The next day I went to Mrs. Woodhouse's, and was informed that Ormesby had been suddenly called out of town, but was expected to return in a week, when he intended to send Lydia immediately to the country. Though she told me this, she did not suspect her brother's motive for her leaving town, and imagined he had only some ordinary visit in view ; but I was aware of his design, and resolved to seize the moment of his absence to accomplish my own.

I proposed it to Lydia, and told her I wished it to take place the next day. An immediate elopement, I said, was necessary, on her brother's account ; not merely from the fear of his preventing our marriage, but that his conduct might not be exposed to the slightest censure from my friends : at the same time I assured her, that I had not the least fear of my father and mother's resentment, after our marriage was over ; though, if they were previously made acquainted with it, they might oppose it in a manner that would occasion us a great deal of trouble.

I did not find it difficult to obtain her con-

sent ; and next morning she got permission from her aunt to visit a friend, at whose house I called on her, and having a post-chaise waiting in a corner of the street, we immediately set out for the north, leaving a letter for Mrs. Woodhouse, to inform her of our departure, which was not to be delivered till the evening.

The first day we travelled quickly ; but I had so little apprehension of pursuit, that, on the second, I thought it unnecessary to travel faster than was agreeable. On the morning of the third, I was alarmed by seeing there had been a heavy fall of snow in the night. We now found it requisite to proceed with the utmost expedition ; but, on our arrival at Lancaster, were told it was impossible to get farther north, the roads being rendered impassable by snow.

This unexpected occurrence threw me into the utmost perplexity. I had not money sufficient for a long absence from town ; and if we waited for the clearing of the roads, there was no knowing how long we might be detained, as the snow continued to fall ; yet, to return unmarried, after our elopement was known, appeared a measure fraught

with such unpleasant consequences to us both, that I could not bear to think of it.

In this dilemma, it occurred to me, that I had an Oxford friend and companion settled as a clergyman at Preston, who might possibly be prevailed upon to marry us. If we could, on our return to town, say that we were married, no attempt, I thought, would be made to separate us; it would be supposed that we had been at Gretna Green, and we would afterwards get the ceremony legally performed.

With difficulty I prevailed on my friend to comply with my request, which, he said, he did only in compafsion to the delicate situation of Lydia. We remained at his house, with his mother, till the banns were thrice proclaimed, the storm still preventing our proceeding north; and, the moment the ceremony was performed, returned to town, but we had not been so long resident at Preston as to render our marriage legal.

I shall pass over every circumstance of my story you are already acquainted with, or that is not material to you to know, and shall proceed to tell you, that when I was settled in a house of my own, I found my situation far

from agreeable. My wife was seventeen, and I was not quite twenty-one. She was amiable, but she was a child. Her capacity was good, but she was so extremely ignorant, that I found no compensation in her society for the restraints she imposed upon me. I had been, from infancy, accustomed to a variety of amusements of which I could ill brook the want. I endeavoured, however, to conceal my chagrin from her, and to console myself for what I suffered, by reflecting how miserable I should have been, if I had seen her and her brother's peace a sacrifice to my indiscretion.

The birth of my eldest son opened a new source of comfort to my view; and when he was a year old, we were both so fond of him, that I began to hope he would compensate to his mother and myself for any disappointment we might suffer in each other. But this pleasing hope was soon blasted, in a manner the most unexpected.

Ormesby had been lately settled in a living I had obtained for him from Sir Esmond Anson. It had been intended by Sir Esmond for Mr. Chilcott, an excellent man, who had a

wife and family to support ; but he saw me so interested for the promotion of my brother-in-law, and thought so highly of him from my representations, that he preferred his interest to Chilcott's.

Soon after Ormesby sent me, in a letter to his sister, a commission to execute for him. It did not require to be done immediately, and when the time for it arrived, having, in some measure, forgot his directions, I desired her to give me the letter, that I might be correct as to the instructions he had given me. She was busy at the moment with her child, and having locked up the letter, she gave me the key of her cabinet, desiring me to look in a certain drawer for a letter in her brother's hand, dated the fourth of October. I did as she directed, and one of the first I laid my hand on, I believed to be the one I wanted. I did not, however, find in it the instructions I expected, and returning to her with it, said, that I supposed her brother's commission had been written on a slip of paper inclosed, for there was not a syllable on the subject in the letter.

She took it from me, and had no sooner

begun to read it, than she turned alternately red and white, and appeared in the utmost confusion.

Here, said she, is a mistake; this letter though dated the fourth of October was written two years ago: my brother is very apt to omit the year in dating his letters, but you will find another of this date in the same drawer.

I will look for it, said I, another time, but tell me at present, why this letter has so strangely affected you? It excited my curiosity when I read it, but the agitation it has thrown you into, surprises and alarms me;—explain to me those ambiguous expressions in it respecting myself, which appear so extraordinary.

At these words she burst into tears, and it was long before she could either speak or be at all composed. At length she made me the following reply.

This letter I wish you had never seen; I kept it for the sake of one part of it, under the persuasion it would be unintelligible to any one but myself. I did not foresee it would ever fall into your hands;—still less that my own behaviour would betray me into an

explanation of the contents. I shall, however, give them truly;—I never deceived you, and never will.—I have permitted you indeed to be deceived in my brother, but it was only because I believed I could not otherwise act properly. I hope you will forgive me,—and that you have too much affection for your son and me, to regret, however you may disapprove of the means by which we have been united.

When my brother first brought you to my aunt's house, he told us you were a particular friend of his, and desired that we should pay you every attention in our power. We did so, and soon after you became a frequent visitor. I rejoiced every time you entered the house, for I thought you extremely agreeable, and knew that in your presence my brother would be in excellent humour, which he was very far from being at other times. You seemed to have a magic power over him, for you were never mentioned without his launching out into your praise, with more than ordinary complacency; and thus whether I heard of you, or saw you, I passed no mo-

ments so delightfully as those which were occupied by you.

After you had visited us for some time in a friendly way, my brother one morning asked me abruptly how I liked you? Perceiving I did not answer readily, he said, I will spare you, Lydia, the trouble of a reply. I have for some time seen that you like Ornvile a great deal better than you can be willing to acknowledge; but I do not blame your partiality,—it is very natural, and I only mention it to tell you, that you may be his wife if you please.

However I may regard Mr. Ornvile, replied I, my marrying him cannot surely depend upon myself.

Entirely, said my brother, if you will be guided by me. I know better than you how men are to be gained,—at least some men, and if you will follow my advice, you may be pretty sure of Ornvile. Let him only see the affection you have for him, and the business is done; he has not half an eye if he does not perceive it already, but it will be very right to give him more encouragement.

Mr. Ornvillle, answered I, can never require encouragement to address me if he is inclined to it, and if he is not, why should I expose myself to his contempt by discovering my affection.

You are a simpleton, replied my brother, and if I did not trust a great deal more to your artlessness than your art, I should never expect to see you in the situation I wish. If Ornvillle feels any partiality for you, the discovery of yours will increase it,—if he does not, it may create it with a man of his disposition. Almost all men are flattered by the attentions of women; some are completely won by them. I know you would not feign a passion you do not feel, to gain any man; but I hope you are not such a fool as to conceal one you really have, when the discovery may serve you essentially.

Would it be honourable, asked I, to endeavour to gain a person's affection, when it may neither be their wish, nor their interest to marry?

It may not always be right, replied my brother, for a man to gain a woman's affection, because it generally happens that he can

pursue easier than she can fly; but it is perfectly fair in you to attempt the conquest of Ornvill's as he can retreat from you as soon as he pleases.—It is necessary to be plain with you, Lydia, continued he, and I beg you will attend particularly to what I say. No woman that is entitled to the name of Lady without being possessed of fortune, has any means of placing herself in an agreeable or respectable situation in life, except by marriage; and it is therefore perfectly right that she should avail herself of every honourable means in her power of marrying well. Men have placed women in this hard condition, and they have no title to complain, though they should sometimes suffer by it. In your case however, there is nothing to be regretted. Here is an amiable young man thrown in your way, and where can be the impropriety of endeavouring to gain his affections? If you have not all the adventitious circumstances in your favour, which he may expect in a wife, you have at least qualities that may render him much happier than the frivolous cold-hearted woman of fashion into whose hands he may otherwise happen to fall.

I would not certainly advise him to marry you;—on the contrary were he to consult me, I would candidly point out to him all the objections that could be made to you, as I have a great regard and high esteem for him; but it would be strange if I should allow my friendship for Ornaville, to make me insensible of the duty I owe my sister. I have hazarded your happiness by bringing him so often into your company, and since you have happened to fix your affections upon him, I ought at least to give you some assistance in gaining him. What I recommend to you must be attended with one of two consequences; it will either make him your lover, which may be the means of rendering you both happy, or will induce him to relinquish your society, in which case he will be safe, and you may, when separated from him, soon recover your tranquillity; but otherwise you cannot expect it, for I cannot now shut my door against him, or alter my behaviour to him in any respect.

I made no answer to all this, and he did not pursue the subject farther. Soon after he went to the country, from which he wrote

me the letter you have just read. He afterwards gave me several instructions for my behaviour to you, which I did not attend to, being resolved to employ no means to gain your affection, but the simple ones my heart dictated. To conceal my affection from you entirely, was not in my power, and I will own that my brother's conversation made me less averse to the discovery of it, than I should otherwise have been; but in the whole of my conduct, I was guided by the conviction that you had it completely in your power to act as you thought proper.—You know the sequel; the interruption of your visits by putting an end to my hopes, threw me into a deep melancholy, which roused your affection, and determined our marriage.

On our return from Preston, my brother lamented to me, as he did to you, our having married clandestinely, which, he said, not even the pity he had felt for my unhappy state, could have induced him to wish, as he was always solicitous for your interest, though he could not be indifferent to mine. I have had a very difficult game to play, Lydia, between you and Orville, continued he; and

I have endeavoured to act justly to you both; yet I know not how he might like to hear of the advice I gave you. He might possibly mistake it, and fancy we acted too much from design. I therefore earnestly advise you never to let him have the least hint of the matter; for there is no saying how very much he might misunderstand it. For your own sake you should be at the utmost pains to give him the most favourable impressions of me that you can, for his attachment to you originated in his liking for me, and the more he loves and esteems your brother, the happier you will find yourself with him. You owe me besides, every consideration, for to me you are certainly indebted for your husband.

Lydia now ceased speaking, and I remained almost petrified with surprise. I was excessively shocked with the duplicity of her brother, but as I did not wish her to know the extent of it, and saw her in great distress, I soon endeavoured to console her by saying, that though I did not approve the conduct of her brother, yet in consideration of his friendship for her, I should never make the least alteration in my behaviour to him.

On my saying this, she changed colour and appeared violently agitated. Fancying her emotion arose solely from concern about him, I again assured her, that he should never have the least cause to suspect the information she had given me; that for her sake I should continue to regard him, if I could not for his own, love him so much as I wished.

At these words, her distress seemed to increase, and eagerly grasping my hand, she said I was too good to be connected with her brother, and she could not permit me to be any longer deceived in him.

How, Lydia! cried I, am I still deceived in him? Is he worse than I know of?

Much worse, she replied; I have told you all that was necessary to explain his letter, but much yet remains to be told before he can be completely unveiled to you. I tremble indeed at the idea of unmasking him, but after what I have said, I should never forgive myself were I not to make you fully acquainted with his character.

Frederic was interrupted in this part of his story by a servant coming to announce the arrival of visitors.

CHAPTER XL

THE first time Frederic had an opportunity of being with Constantia alone, he thus resumed his narrative.

“ I begged Lydia to tell me freely all she knew of her brother, without any fear of consequences; for his affection for her would always be his shield with me.

Alas! she replied, it is not for him I have any concern; I never liked him, and owe him nothing:—it is for your peace only I am anxious.

Owe him nothing! repeated I, astonished; how is it possible, when he interested himself so kindly in your marriage?

Because, answered she, he did it for his own sake alone; he hoped by the interest of

your family to obtain preferment in the church.

Incredible! cried I; he could not be so base! he could never be actuated solely by self-interest!

She wept bitterly without making any reply.

Tell me, I conjure you, said I, on what circumstances you rest your suspicions, and why you have concealed his villany from me so long?

I knew little of it, returned she, till the visit my aunt made me two months ago: it was then only I obtained perfect knowledge of his character.

Your aunt then, said I, is as bad as himself?

Oh no, she replied, she is very different, and I owe her much. It was only by slow degrees she became herself acquainted with the motives of his conduct, and not till my peace was too much involved in the event, to permit her interference.

Tell me at once, cried I, every thing you know about your brother, if you wish that we should ever live in harmony together.

The task, said she, is agonizing, but I will perform it, and leave the event to hea-

ven.—Before I became acquainted with you, I lived very unhappily with my brother; he never showed me any kindness, and was very ill-tempered. I had lost my mother when a child, and my father died when I was fourteen, leaving me to the care of my aunt and brother. The latter assumed over me the authority of a parent; and as my father had impressed me with the highest respect for the ties of blood, I never thought of disputing his commands, however harshly delivered, and should have been entirely guided by his opinions, had they not been counteracted by my aunt.

After our acquaintance with you began, his behaviour softened, and he appeared so kindly interested for me with regard to you, that I was fully persuaded he had my interest sincerely at heart.

I said so to Mrs. Woodhouse the last time she was here; upon which she told me I was mistaken, and that she thought it right to undeceive me, as otherwise, the obligations I fancied myself under to my brother, would give him an influence over me through life, which might be pernicious to me, and of

which he was extremely undeserving. She then told me, that a little while before he brought you to her house, she wished me to accept of an invitation I had received to pass some time in the country with Miss Hallet, a friend and companion of mine, whose brother showed me so much affection, that my aunt believed he intended to address me. He was a young clergyman of an amiable character, who had a small independent property, and his sister Maria was of so sweet a disposition, and so superior in her understanding and pursuits, to the generality of girls, that my aunt thought I should be extremely fortunate in being connected with such a family.

My brother, however, would not permit me to go to them, and told my aunt privately, that she must not give any encouragement to Hallet; for, though he might do well enough as a husband for me, he did not suit him as a brother-in-law, and that he had higher views for me, which, he hoped, I should one day have cause to thank him for.

Mrs. Woodhouse was obliged to acquiesce, but had not the least suspicion who the per-

son was he had in view for me, till some time after you became our visitor, when she found him contriving frequent pretexts for leaving you alone with me. To accomplish this effectually, he was obliged to ask her concurrence, which he did at first by saying, he saw I was partial to you, and thought it a pity not to give me all the chance he could of gaining your affection.

My aunt disapproved of his method of doing this; and as he found, by her conduct, that she did not comply with his wishes, he again spoke to her more seriously on the subject, and accused her of cruelty to me, in not endeavouring to promote my union with you. She said that she could discover no partiality in you for me, and ought therefore to discourage mine for you. He replied that you would soon become fond of me, if you were often in my company, without having other objects to engage your attention; that attachments were generally the effect of situation, very seldom of taste; and that he had no doubt you would soon regard me with affection, if we were only left to ourselves.

She said if that were the case, it was his

duty to separate us, as you were too young to marry, and your friends would never approve of your marrying me. He answered, their approbation was unnecessary; their forgiveness would be sufficient, when the marriage was over. She replied, she did not think it would conduce to my happiness, to become a member of a family against its inclination, and might be prejudicial to him, as he would be justly censured for promoting the connexion.

His promoting it, he said, would not be known; and, in fact, all he meant to do was to leave us to ourselves; that you were certainly capable of taking care of yourself; and as for me, my happiness should in justice be the object of his care, as he ought to have foreseen what would be the consequence to me of bringing you to the house. He added, that so far from considering our marriage as prejudicial to his interest, he viewed it as the infallible means of making his fortune; as Sir John Orville had several livings in his gift, and great interest, which, if Lydia married his son, would sooner or later be employed for his preferment, and he hoped this con-

sideration would have a proper influence on her conduct.

She told him she thought he was building castles on sandy foundations; for it was very improbable that your friends would interest themselves for him, if they were displeased with the marriage.

If it should be so, replied my brother, I shall still have an agreeable and useful connexion in Ornaville, but from the character of his father and mother, I am led to expect more. Sir John is too good and just a man not to forgive his son an error, which, in a youth, he will regard as more unfortunate than blamable; and as for Lady Ornaville's displeasure, it will not survive a week, as she is remarkable for that weak indulgence of her children, by which so many female fools have the honour of ruining the happiness of their family, providing torment for themselves, and sending into the world misguided beings to be the pest of society. They will both, therefore, in time, adopt my interest as their own, especially if Lydia has a family; for though they should always be indifferent about me personally, they will regard the

uncle of their grand-children, and endeavour to place him in a respectable situation.

Mrs. Woodhouse found it was impossible to alter his views, but in the warmth of their conversation, she discovered, by some expressions he inadvertently dropped, that he had thought of you as a brother-in-law before he brought you to her house, and that it was on your account he had discouraged Hallet. She asked him, why he had not been at more pains to conciliate me, since he had so long entertained the view of making me a useful connection, and must be sensible that on my favour for him, much of his success with my husband's relations might depend?

I am under no apprehensions at all about her, he replied; if she marries Orville, she must be conscious, that she owes him entirely to me, and will likewise know that his esteem and attachment to her will be strengthened by his good opinion of her family. For her own sake, therefore, she will be careful of my interest, and rejoice in my preferment; for there is a reflected light we derive from the prosperity of relations, which it is not to be supposed that she will be more insensible to, than

others. I have seen even good men weak enough to be flattered by their relation to an exalted scoundrel ; and on this absurd regard to the ties of blood I rest my hopes. You think they are built on a sandy foundation, but examine the conduct of individuals, and you will find the ties of consanguinity form a pillar on which I may very safely lean. In spite of the indifference to relations so frequently complained of, the ties of blood have, by one means or other, an influence on almost every transaction of life : blockheads will be promoted, and villains pardoned almost any crime, if they have but good connections.

My aunt was so much dissatisfied with my brother's sentiments, that she resolved to contrive some means of saving you without betraying him ; but on conversing with me, she found my affection for you so deeply rooted, that she abandoned her design as cruel to me ; and determined to leave you to act as you thought proper, persuading herself, from her partiality for me, that, as you would marry me from affection alone, I had qualities which might render you happy.

Lydia now ended her narration, but it was long before the cruel sensations it excited would suffer me to speak. At last, I asked, why she had not informed me of her brother's character the moment she knew it? How she could for an instant, allow me to cherish such a serpent in my bosom?

She said, she was deterred from it by her aunt, but that it was the consciousness of his unworthiness, more than the letter I had read, which threw her so unexpectedly into confusion, and betrayed her into the confession she had made. She told me that Mrs. Woodhouse had said, the discovery of his character could only give me distress, and had declared she would never forgive herself for betraying the confidence he had reposed in her, if it should ruin him with me. She advised Lydia to give me, by degrees, such a knowledge of his disposition, as might put me on my guard against his insincerity and selfishness, without exciting suspicion of his artful conduct to myself; adding, that she would not yet have trusted this to her discretion, had not her infirm state of health made her fear, that she might not live to do it at a fitter period.

Lydia then showed me a letter from Mrs. Woodhouse enforcing this advice, and exhorting her to remember, how earnestly her father had requested that she and her brother would always live in friendship, and be lenient to the failings of each other. She concluded her letter by saying, that however Lydia might disapprove of the conduct of her brother, she ought never to forget how nearly he was related to her, and that it was, therefore, her duty to treat him with indulgence.

It is impossible to describe to you the torment I endured on finding I had been the prey of such a man, but I saw my wife so miserable, that I was obliged to stifle my rage before her as well as I could, and happily she imagined my vexation arose entirely from disappointment in Ormesby. The view, indeed, he gave me of human nature, was not the least part of the misery he brought upon me, but the injury I had done to Chilcote, rankled chiefly in my mind. I saw him always before me;—a virtuous man struggling with a large family under all the hardships of poverty. Sir Esmond had said that he would not have preferred any man to him except my brother,

and now I became sensible that had Ormesby even been the character I supposed, he ought not to have been preferred, on the score of consanguinity alone, to a good man in the situation of Chilcott.

The rays of sunshine which had gilded our dwelling on the birth of my son, now departed. I grew sick of myself, and of every thing in life, and flew for relief to that love of play I had imbibed at Ornvile, and had with difficulty suppressed. Gaming, I found a remedy for my distempered mind, although it ultimately increased my misery, and brought a load of vexation on my father. The grief it occasioned him, and the kind and just manner in which he testified his disapprobation, had more effect in reclaiming me, than regard to my own interest, and I renounced gaming for ever.

Again I sought consolation in my son. He had never been indifferent to me, and was now at a most engaging age. He and his brother rendered home once more agreeable, and increased my tenderness for their mother.

At this period Ormesby died. I had written to him, on the disclosure of his cha-

racter, that I had discovered the base arts he had practised to effect a marriage between his sister and me, and that not even my regard for her should prevent my exposing his conduct to the world. The symptoms of a consumption were then beginning to appear in him, and I believe my letter hurried him to the grave. He would otherwise have escaped unpunished by me. The ties of blood proved indeed a pillar on which he might rest, for though Lydia had no regard for him, I could not, on reflection, wound the feelings of her, or of Mrs. Woodhouse, by exposing his perfidy.

On his death, Sir Esmond appointed Chilcott his successor, which contributed greatly to restore my tranquillity, and I believe I should now have been happy had my wife conducted herself prudently. Her temper naturally anxious, had been much hurt by the indifference I had long shown for home, and disappointed of the affection she expected from me, she mourned her misfortune incessantly. When at last, she saw me sit with pleasure at my fireside, she saw likewise, it was from the delight I took in my children, and though the

most affectionate mother, she became jealous of them, and could not conceal the uneasiness she suffered. She said she now saw I had a heart formed for affection, although I could not bestow it upon her.

Unfortunate error! she knew little of human nature, or she would have known, that she could not have had a surer avenue to my affections than through my children.

Could she have governed her feelings, I am persuaded we should have been happy, for she was otherwise an agreeable companion. Time, and her visits to Ornaville Abbey, had improved her in many respects. Her ideas were expanded, her judgment formed, her manners engaging, and her countenance no longer insipid, seemed to possess a beauty to which I had hitherto been insensible. She never returned from Kent without appearing more pleasing. Such is the effect of virtuous and enlightened society!

But she tormented me so much with her complaints, that I often wished myself at a distance from her, and the impatience I showed of her behaviour, rendered her still more unhappy. She frequently declared,

she wished we were separated, for in absence she might recover tranquillity, but was certain we could never be happy together.

A few months before she left England, we were visited by Mr. Rooke, the clergyman that married us, who expressed much regret on finding the ceremony had not been again performed.—I had intended, on leaving Preston, that we should be again married, but no inquiries having been made by our friends about the ceremony, I did not reflect on the importance of having it renewed, and ignorance prevented Lydia from thinking of it at all. After the visit of Mr. Rooke, she urged the renewal of it, but I hesitated, lest it should prove injurious to our children; and while the measure hung in suspense, the illness of her grandfather hurried her to Altona, a month sooner than she had intended.

Soon after her departure, I became acquainted with Miss Alderton, a most engaging woman, who taught me what it really was to love.

Here Frederic repeated to Constantia the particulars he had given Mr. Hanway, and

concluded his recital by earnestly requesting her commiseration and advice.

She was extremely embarrassed how to reply. She was most unwilling to shock his feelings by an immediate and explicit avowal of her sentiments; yet she was no less averse to conceal them entirely, if he insisted on knowing her opinion. She told him, that the more she felt for his situation, the more she was reluctant to offer advice on a subject of such importance, when he had other friends on whose judgment the utmost reliance could be placed.

“So says Mrs. Almorne, Constantia; and thus I may be left to the guidance of my own feelings, which, I am conscious, are too much interested and fluctuating to be trusted.”

“You cannot trust them at present, but time may enable you to take a calmer view of the subject; I am myself perhaps too much swayed by feeling, to judge of it fairly.”

“ And whither does your feeling lead you? I am afraid you are not aware of my sufferings.”

“ Be assured I have a very strong sense of them.”

“ But your countenance is dark ;—you disprove of my intention ?”

“ I feel for your wife, Frederic; you know how I love and esteem her. I lament her errors, but I lament also her misfortunes; she has been, as well as yourself, a victim to the selfishness of her brother: had it not been for him, she might now have been happy, the wife of Hallet.”

It is too true; he hazarded her happiness much more than mine in every stage of his plot. His conduct and that of Hastings have almost given me a disgust to the name of brother.—But the question now, Constantia, is in what degree I should continue the victim of Ormesby's baseness. If Lydia cannot be happy with me, ought I to continue

miserable with her? If she was displeased with me when I did not prefer another, what would she suffer now, when my heart is absorbed in a new affection? she would quickly discern the altered state of my mind, and her wretchedness added to my own, would be more than I could support. My distress, however, should be disregarded; but I have more than her's to consider. Ought I to be indifferent to what Miss Alderton suffers for me? Can it be right to make her for ever unhappy, for a partial benefit to Lydia?"

"Is it certain, Frederic, that Miss Alderton will not recover her tranquillity if she loses you?"

"There can be little doubt of it; her affection for me, and the gentleness of her disposition, leave it almost unquestionable."

"You think her then very amiable?"

"As an angel! you would be charmed with her, Constantia; she is a model of simplicity and sweetness."

“ Good heaven ! thought Constantia, what a blind passion is this ! Can he not see, that the woman who encourages the affections of a married man, *must be unworthy* ? Could I have loved Valmonsor, if he had sought to detach me from my duty ? ”

“ I am afraid,” said Frederic, perceiving her in a reverie, “ you condemn me more than you are willing to acknowledge. Your mind must revolt from any encroachment on the fidelity of marriage vows ; you have been accustomed to regard wedlock as a sacred institution,—but to deserve this respect, it should be established on a different plan. The misery I have suffered from it, may not entitle me to annul my marriage, but might not Lydia have been the counterpart of her brother, and as guilty as himself in ensnaring me ? Would it not then be shocking to reason,—to humanity, that I should be condemned to associate for life with such a character, and be irremediably the victim of her worthlessness ?—Yet even then, how light would be my sufferings compared with those of thousands of helpless women, who

daily experience the most brutal treatment from their husbands? You know, Constantia, how often my father's influence has been employed in saving unfortunate women from the most systematic outrage of their husbands."

"Too well I know it."

"Is it not monstrous then, that there should be no means of dissolving the tie which often chains the good to the wicked, except one, which in many cases, leads only to the triumph of the guilty?—The laws of marriage as they are now framed, permit the real triumph of vice over virtue!"

"I am not insensible of this, Frederic; and think divorces should be permitted on various grounds; but they should be granted with the utmost caution, and only from the strongest motives, otherwise the most fatal consequences would ensue. Were they easily attained, women might tremble for the conduct of good, as well as bad men: for, might not the best be misled by the insidious arts of unprincipled women?—If you, who are so

amiable, who love your children tenderly, and at least esteem your wife, can be induced to abandon her, what woman could be secure of her place in society a moment?—What disorder, what vast variety of wretchedness would infallibly arise?

“I do not deny that; Constantia, but there is no necessity for extremes; and the present marriage laws are certainly productive of the heaviest calamities, though custom blinds us to the source from which they spring.”

Constantia made no reply.

After a long silence, Frederic renewed the conversation by saying, “If Lydia could be happy with me, I certainly ought not to forsake her; but if she cannot, should we all three continue eternally miserable?”

“It is not Lydia’s interest alone, that opposes your design; there are many other points to be considered. What would become of your children?”

“ It is my intention that they should remain some time with their mother, both for her sake and theirs. In a few years, their education and the pursuits of life would, at all events, remove them from her.”

“ But not finally; it is only by your marrying Miss Alderton, that they can have the misfortune to be always separated from one or other of their parents. And are you prepared to resign them even for a few years? or can you expect Miss Alderton to regard them with the tenderness of their mother?”

“ Is it not cruel, Constantia, that which ever way I act, I must be wretched? You do not,—you cannot know what it is to have your heart torn by affection for a person, from whom it may be your fate to be forever separated!”

“ It is my knowledge of the affliction,” replied Constantia, with a sigh, “ that makes me feel so deeply for the unfortunate Lydia; is it not the very situation into which you would throw her? Of her affection you can

have no doubt,—it has been the sole cause of her errors. You know the sincerity, the tenderness, the innocence of her heart;—and can I forget how I have seen her clasp your children to her breast, and bathe them with her tears, when I said they resembled you?”

“ Say no more, Constantia ; say no more ; you harrow my very soul:—for her sake, I will be miserable.”

At these words Frederic rose in violent agitation ; walked in a disorderly manner across the room, and throwing open a door, went into the next apartment.

Constantia followed to endeavour to calm him, but hardly had he advanced a few steps, when a little chair belonging to his children, which stood in a corner, caught his eye;—he stopt,—trembled, and turned pale ;—then giving Constantia a look of exquisite anguish, he precipitately left the room, and shut himself up in his own apartment to conceal there the distraction of his mind.

CHAPTER XII.

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CONSTANTIA saw with the deepest sorrow, the wretched state of Frederic, which she feared was irremediable ; yet there were moments in which she ventured to indulge the hopes that Mrs. Almorne had held out to her, and she rejoiced in her journey to town, as affording, if possible, the means of extricating him from his unfortunate attachment to Miss Alderton.

Mrs. Almorne was herself most deeply interested in the fate of Frederic ; and her first care on her arrival in London, was to go to Mr. Hanway's, but he was unluckily out of town, and not expected to return for some days. She then went directly to Mr. Anson's house, in Portland Place, where she arrived

at four o'clock in the afternoon, the day after she left Ornvile.

She found him nearly restored to health, and was received by him and Sir Esmond with the utmost cordiality.

Mr. Anson was a venerable old man, who had always lived in the strictest friendship with his brother and Lady Anson, and had adopted the relations and friends of the latter, as his own. The vicinity of Anson House to Ornvile Abbey, had made him from infancy well acquainted with her family, and though some years older than Sir John, he had always been his companion and most intimate friend.

Soon after the marriage of Mrs. Almorne, he was introduced to her, and had ever since regarded her with that admiration and respect, which her character merited. They now met with all the kindness and satisfaction, that long friendship and mutual esteem could inspire, heightened, on the part of both, by hope of the good effects which might result from their

meeting: Mr. Anson immediately declaring that her presence was necessary to perfect his recovery.

Some time was passed in kind inquiries about each other, and their mutual friends, in which Sir Esmond joined with so much warmth, that Mrs. Almorne did not immediately discover any alteration in him; but during dinner she perceived he was not in his usual spirits, and upon his retiring not long after it, Mr. Anson observed, that he was no longer the happy, gay young man, she had been accustomed to see him.

She replied, that she saw with much regret a considerable change in his spirits, but trusted the cause was not irremediable.

“ If it can be remedied,” rejoined Mr. Anson, “ it must be by you; and I have formed high expectations of the benefit we are to derive from your counsel and assistance.”

“ You cannot think too highly of my desire

to serve you" said Mrs. Almorne, "but dare I flatter myself it will be in my power?"

"Of that you will be able to judge when you know Esmond's situation, but my hopes are sanguine. I hinted to you in my letter, that he had got into an entanglement: it is a peculiar one, and has been the cause of much concern to us both. His story you shall have from himself, for he knows my intention to consult you, and highly approves of it. When I first wrote to you, I did not inform him, but on being taken ill, the fear of our not meeting so soon as I wished, made me acknowledge what I had done, and beg he would instantly go to you. He could not be prevailed on to leave me in a state, which I believe was alarming, but he consented to employ some of the heavy hours he passed in attendance on me, in writing you a narrative of his story. This we proposed sending you as soon as it should be completed, if your engagements or my health did not then allow us to meet; but it was hardly finished, when I got so much better as to permit the hope of seeing you here. His labour however, will not

be lost, for the reading his manuscript will be the best way of making you acquainted with his story. He would feel much anxiety and embarrassment in giving you the detail in conversation, nor could you receive it to so much advantage, as when you can deliberate at leisure on the various parts of it as they may happen to strike you."

"Since his story is peculiar, I am more pleased to receive a written account of it."

"The sooner you peruse it the better, for his anxiety to know your opinion is great. He meant to send you his narrative by his servant, but lest it should by any accident fall into other hands, he speaks of himself as of a third person, and left the names blank to be filled up by means of a letter, he was previously to send you. He has now filled them up himself, and given me the manuscript."

Mr. Anson then delivered to Mrs. Almorne a packet, saying, it contained a most minute account of his story, which he had thought

absolutely necessary to enable her to form a just opinion of the characters concerned in it.

Mrs. Almorne said she would not open it till she retired for the night, but would not sleep till it was perused, that Sir Esmond might know her opinion early in the morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT an early hour Mrs. Almorne wished Mr. Anson and Sir Esmond good night, and as soon as she was in her apartment, opened the manuscript, and read as follows.

One morning in the end of February, as Sir Esmond Anson was coming from Pall Mall to St. James's Park, a violent shower of hail induced him to stop in St. James's till it should cease.

As he stood, he observed two ladies near him, who had also taken shelter from the storm. One of them was elderly, the other very young, and Sir Esmond thought had the

finest form, and most beautiful face he had ever seen. The expression of her countenance was uncommonly mild, and her voice, as she addressed her companion, sweet and plaintive.

The dress of both was so plain as scarcely to entitle them to the appellation of gentlewomen, yet their air and manner showed they could not be of vulgar condition. The elder appeared extremely anxious about the young one; placed her in the most sheltered situation, and taking a cambric handkerchief from her pocket, wrapped it about her neck with the utmost care.

The hail was succeeded by a heavy rain, which induced Sir Esmond to offer them his services in calling a coach, but his offer was civilly declined. He then endeavoured to enter into conversation with them, but not more successfully. The old lady answered him in civil, but few words; the young one remained silent without appearing to attend.

After long waiting, the rain ceased, and they departed. Sir Esmond followed them at

a distance into Castle Street, where he saw them enter a house of very mean appearance.

His admiration had never been so highly raised as by the youngest; and there was something in the appearance of both that strongly excited his curiosity. He wished to know if they were visitors or residents in the house they had entered, and walked long near it to see if they would come out, but despairing at length of seeing them, he went into a small shop adjoining, to inquire by whom the house was inhabited.

He was informed it was possessed by a Mrs. Sorell, who from the description given of her could not be either of the persons he had seen; but on further inquiry, he found she had lodgers, who were probably the strangers he was desirous to hear of: their names he could not learn.

The next morning, the thoughts of the beautiful incognita ran so much in Sir Esmond's head, that he strolled into Castle Street in hopes of seeing her; but after walking fruitlessly for some time, it occurred to him, that

the best means of obtaining information about her was to call on Mrs. Sorell, on pretence of inquiring for lodgings. This he immediately did, and found Mrs. Sorell at home, who invited him into a small, mean parlour, which corresponded with her appearance. She was a little, thick, squat, vulgar looking woman, whose countenance and manner gave no impressions in her favour.

In answer to his inquiries, she told him that she had no lodgings vacant, but might soon have, as they were only let by the week, and the stay of her present lodgers was very uncertain.

A few more inquiries from Sir Esmond, led Mrs. Sorell to suspect he was more inquisitive about her lodgers than her lodgings. She confessed her suspicions, adding, that she could not be surprised if they were just, as many gentlemen had called upon her on their account, though there were none, whose appearance gave her so great an inclination to oblige as his self.

Mrs. Sorell's looks were more expressive than her words; Sir Esmond understood them as she wished, and in a few minutes they understood each other so well, that he obtained from her the following intelligence.

The ladies he had seen enter her house, were a Mrs. Fanbrook and her daughter, who had been with her a few weeks, but of whom she knew little more than the name. They had no visitors; appeared to be very poor, and employed themselves in needle-work for their support. Miss Fanbrook was so handsome, that she seldom went abroad without being followed by gentlemen, some of whom had made offers to her mother for her, and the offer of one gentleman was so great, that she supposed it would be accepted, as soon as he returned from the country, whither he had been obliged to go for a short time; but Mrs. Sorell observed that Sir Esmond's appearance would certainly induce Miss Fanbrook to give him the preference, if he chose to make her proposals in the interim.

Sir Esmond was solicitous to know, on what

circumstances Mrs. Sorell rested suppositions so opposite to the opinion he had formed of Mrs. Fanbrook and her daughter from their appearance and behaviour, and was told the delicate health of the latter must soon oblige her mother to have recourse to some means of improving their finances, as she was unable to bear the hardships to which she was exposed ; and it was probable that Mrs. Fanbrook had only delayed accepting some of the offers she had received, from anxiety to make the best bargain for her daughter that she could. Mrs. Sorell said that she could have no scruples of another kind, as she had discovered by a conversation she had overheard between them, that they had come to town not long ago, on account of a quarrel they had had with a country squire, with whom Miss Fanbrook had lived for some time.

Sir Esmond was shocked by this account, though he was not inclined to give it implicit credit ; for if he had any skill in physiognomy, Miss Fanbrook was innocent, and her mother good ; but as, from their dress and lodgings,

there could be no doubt of their poverty, he resolved to make such offers to Mrs. Fanbrook as might be the means of ascertaining her character, and of saving her daughter, if she was yet uncorrupted.

Mrs. Sorell informed him that they took a walk in the park every morning about eleven when the weather was favourable, and he resolved to attempt having an interview with them there, before he made the proposals he intended ; which he meant to make by letter, as the easiest mode of proceeding for himself, and the most delicate for them, if their characters were respectable.

He wrote to Mrs. Fanbrook in concise terms of the information he had received, offering a *carte blanche* for her daughter if they were true ; but intreating, if pecuniary difficulties alone induced her to listen to such proposals, that she would permit him to have the happiness of rendering her independent of them. He added every information about his family and fortune he thought necessary, and

offered any testimony she should think requisite, to assure her that he was the person he represented himself to be.

Before eleven the next morning he went to Mrs. Sorell's, and sat in her parlour till she informed him that Mrs. Fanbrook and her daughter were gone to take their usual walk ; he then left the house, and followed them slowly till they had advanced a considerable way into the park, when he quickened his pace, and coming up to Mrs. Fanbrook, addressed her with much civility, expressing his hope that she had not suffered from the storm to which she had been exposed, when he had the pleasure of seeing her.

She answered complaisantly, but seemed disconcerted by his address, and after walking a few paces, wished him good morning, and turned away abruptly.

As it was evidently her intention to get quit of him, he made no attempt to follow her, but walked up the Mall, and on returning met them. He only bowed as he passed close to

Miss Fanbrook, who appeared to more advantage than she had done the former day, and seemed so exquisitely lovely, with an expression of countenance so divine, that he wished to be rivetted to the spot on which he could behold her.

He met them once more as they came down the Mall, which they immediately quitted, and went into Spring Garden. As they had taken a much shorter walk, than Mrs. Sorrell said was their custom, he suspected they had done so to avoid him, and had gone by Spring Garden to elude his notice, which increased his distrust of Mrs. Sorrell's information, and his desire of serving them.

In a quarter of an hour he went to her house, where he found they had come immediately on leaving the park. He desired her to let Mrs. Fanbrook know, that a gentleman begged leave to wait upon her on business, and was soon admitted into a small apartment, where he found her alone. He apologised for the intrusion, presented his letter, saying, he

would call for an answer the next morning, and left her without giving time for a reply.

He passed the time in much anxiety till he waited on Mrs. Fanbrook the following day.

She received him civilly, and told him she was not surprised at the information that had been given him, as her situation exposed her to misrepresentations; that the account he had heard of her daughter was perfectly erroneous, and though their pecuniary difficulties were considerable, they were not such as to induce them to accept of assistance.

He expressed much regret for her being in a state that exposed her to any indignity, and earnestly entreated that she would permit him to relieve her from pecuniary embarrassments.

She declined compliance with his request, but with acknowledgments for his generosity.

He replied that in his situation, his offer did not deserve to be called generous, and he hoped she would not upon inquiry find his character altogether unworthy of the favour he solicited; that it would give him the truest pleasure to render her and her daughter independent; and to prevent any scruples she might have in complying with his wishes, he would, if she desired it, promise never to see them again.

Mrs. Fanbrook thanked him in very expressive terms, but positively declined receiving any pecuniary assistance at present; declaring, however, that if she should suffer greater distress than she yet apprehended, she would remember that from his benevolence she might expect relief.

He was obliged to depart without obtaining any farther concession; but he did not leave her without high impressions in her favour. At their former meetings his attention had been so much engrossed by her daughter, that he had not leisure to consider her; he now found that she had a countenance which dis-

covered great force of character, without being deficient in feminine softness. Her figure was graceful, and her face had the remains of beauty, which seemed to have been impaired by Sorrow, more than the hand of Time ; and through the whole of her appearance, there was a melancholy, which seemed to say, there was nothing in life that could give her joy.

Sir Esmond's curiosity to know her history was great, but he had no chance of hearing of her except by Mrs. Sorell, whom he enjoined to give him all the intelligence she could procure, and particularly to inform him the moment Mrs. Fanbrook discovered any intention of leaving her lodgings.

* * * *

FOR several days Sir Esmond forbore going to the Park, that he might not alarm Mrs. Fanbrook ; but his imagination was incessantly haunted by the lovely figure of Miss Fanbrook, the sorrow of her mother, and their forlorn situation ; and pity, conspiring with admiration, to interest him in their fate, he resolved to attempt seeing them once more.

At eleven o'clock he went to the Park, where he had not walked long before he saw Miss Fanbrook enter it alone ; but hardly had she advanced a few steps, before she was joined by a gay looking man, who appeared to be her acquaintance. He talked to her earnestly, and seemed eager to attract her notice, but her behaviour was silent and reserved.

After Sir Esmond had followed them a short time, he approached Miss Fanbrook, and politely accosted her. She appeared to recollect him perfectly, and answered him civilly. He inquired after her mother, who, she told him, was not so well as to come abroad; and, to farther inquiries he made about Mrs. Fanbrook, she replied with great sweetness, and with much less reserve than she showed to her other companion, who seemed to regard Sir Esmond with the most jealous eye, and endeavoured to prevent his engaging the attention of Miss Fanbrook.

She seemed little disposed to enter into conversation with either; and, when they returned down the Mall, wished them good morning, and went into Castle Street.

Neither of them attempted to follow her; and, after sauntering a few minutes at a distance from each other, they quitted the Park.

Sir Esmond had no doubt she shortened her walk to avoid him; yet his wish to see her again was so strong, that he returned to the

Park the next morning. She did not, however, appear, though the day was fine; and, after waiting vainly some hours, he left it.

The following morning he found himself, almost without intending it, in the Park at eleven, but he was not more fortunate than he had been the preceding day; and fearing Miss Fanbrook was prevented from walking by the illness of her mother, he called at Mrs. Sorell's to inquire after them.

Mrs. Sorell, who was ever obsequious, very frankly told him, that Miss Fanbrook had changed her hour of walking to nine o'clock, in order to avoid meeting with a gentleman whose attentions were troublesome; but added, that she would very soon return to her ordinary hour, as she would find the gentleman would attend her whatever time she walked.

"That must be your fault," said Sir Esmond; "if you did not inform him of her hour of going abroad, she would remain unmolested."

“ Why Sir,” asked Mrs. Sorell, with the greatest coolness, “ should I not answer his questions as well as yours ?”

“ I have no intention of troubling Miss Fanbrook,” said Sir Esmond ; “ she cannot suffer by my inquiries.”

“ My silence could be of no service to her,” returned Mrs. Sorell, “ for the gentleman employs a spy to watch all her measures.”

“ Who is he ?” cried Sir Esmond, indignantly ; “ how dare he presume to trouble her ?”

“ I don’t know him, Sir ; but there is no occasion to be under such concern about Miss Fanbrook ; she and her mother can take mighty good care of themselves.”

“ How !” said Sir Esmond, “ do you not tell me, that she will not be able to avoid him, though she wishes it ?”

“ Yes, Sir ; to be sure she is sometimes a little incommoded, because she does not al-

ways find it perfectly convenient to be followed by every one of her admirers, but she knows how to manage them notwithstanding: she has learnt extremely well how to act her part."

Sir Esmond was not pleased with Mrs. Sorell's insinuations; but as he was not certain that they were totally unjust, he thought it prudent to suppress the resentment they excited, and content himself with putting a number of questions that might discover the character and situation of Miss Fanbrook: but Mrs. Sorell's answers were far from satisfactory, and he was obliged to leave her, without receiving more information than she had previously given.

Anxious, however, to know if he could at all trust her accounts, he went to the Park the next morning at nine o'clock, muffled up in a great coat and flapped hat, that if Miss Fanbrook was there, he might see her without being known.

He had been in it but a few minutes, before she appeared, alone. There were few

people in the Park, and she walked unnoticed by any one but himself, till she came near Buckingham-gate, when she was accosted by a gentleman. He appeared elderly ; and in his manner of addressing Miss Fanbrook, there was a mixture of audacity and respect.

The moment she saw him she turned, as if desirous to avoid him, but he kept close to her, and talked with great eagerness, though in a very low tone.

She continued silent, and walked fast, till he put his arm about her waist, and endeavoured to detain her : she then begged him to leave her, and struggled to get from him, but he held her fast, and was obliging her to return towards Buckingham-gate, when Sir Esmond advancing, commanded him instantly to leave the lady at liberty.

“ By what right,” cried the other fiercely, “ do you dare to interfere with me ? ”

Sir Esmond seeing he still kept hold of her, listened only to the counsel the terror im-

printed on her countenance suggested ; and seizing her persecutor by the arms, threw him at a distance : then immediately discovering himself, begged she would be perfectly easy, as she was in no danger of being farther insulted.

She thanked him in most grateful terms, while her tormentor returning, muttered, in a very bullying tone, something to Sir Esmond about demanding satisfaction.

Sir Esmond instantly gave him his address, and told him, he should always find him ready to protect innocence, and chastise insolence, wherever he met with them.

His antagonist said something about taking a more proper time to punish his impertinence, and then walked off.

Miss Fanbrook repeated her thanks to Sir Esmond for the protection he had afforded her, expressing at the same time much concern, lest it should involve him in a quarrel.

He assured her there was no trouble to be apprehended, as he saw, from the behaviour of his opponent, that nothing would result from his threats, and asked if she was acquainted with him ?

She said she knew him only by meeting him in the Park, where he had been several times troublesome, but never so much so as this morning, owing, perhaps, to the number of people present at other times having kept him in awe.

Sir Esmond asked if she did not think it would be proper to give up walking alone, especially at so early an hour ?

She answered quickly, that she would walk no more in the Park at all, for it had only been productive of vexation to her.

Sir Esmond strongly encouraged this resolution, though almost with regret, as it would deprive him of, perhaps, the only chance he had of seeing her ; but anxiety for her safety made him repeatedly urge her to avoid walk-

ing any where, unless accompanied by her mother, and even then in a less public place, which she declared it was her firm determination to do.

Having conducted her to Mrs. Sorell's door, he asked if he might sometimes be permitted to wait upon her and Mrs. Fanbrook ?

She replied, that her mother's state of health made it impossible for them to receive the favour of his visits ; but they would always most gratefully remember their obligations to him.

Sir Esmond parted from her, fully persuaded that Mrs. Sorell's injurious suspicions of her were perfectly unjust ; but as it was evident that she was in a very unhappy and dangerous situation for a girl of her uncommon attractions, he could not help feeling an extraordinary degree of anxiety about her, which he believed to be as much the offspring of pity, as of the admiration with which she had inspired him.

The next day he had an engagement which obliged him to go into the country, where he was detained above a week.

* * * *

ON his return he went to Mrs. Sorell's in the evening, about eight o'clock, the time he thought there was the least chance of being seen by Mrs. Fanbrook. He knocked at the door with a feeling of unhappiness he hardly knew how to account for; it might be merely concern for the melancholy situation of Miss Fanbrook,—or was it a secret dread of hearing she belonged to another?

The door was opened by Mrs. Sorell, who invited him into her parlour. She told him, that Mrs. and Miss Fanbrook were still in her house, and that the former was confined to her room by indisposition, having been suddenly seized with a severe cold and feverish disorder, from which she was recovering, but was still extremely weak.

Sir Esmond made numerous inquiries about her and Miss Fanbrook, and was informed that Mrs. Fanbrook had no body attending her except her daughter, who had been in the greatest affliction about her mother ; that they paid ready money for every thing they got, but confined their expenses to the narrowest limits possible, allowing themselves only in a very circumscribed degree the mere necessaries of life, without any of its comforts ; and that they both appeared sunk in the deepest dejection.

This account awakened so forcibly the compassion of Sir Esmond, that, almost without knowing what he did, he repeated question after question, till Mrs. Sorell, despairing of satisfying his curiosity, told him he might see them, if he pleased, without being seen by them.

He desired to know how ; upon which she said, that they sat directly opposite to the door of their room, in which there was an aperture that would permit him to see them distinctly ; and if they should rise, it would be easy for

him to retreat, before they could get to the door.

Sir Esmond hesitated whether he should avail himself of Mrs. Sorrell's proposal. He thought it dishonourable thus to steal upon them in the sanctuary of their chamber;—yet anxiety to see them,—and to see them where they must be wholly undisguised, overcame his objections, and he compromised with his conscience, by resolving to take only a momentary view.

Conducted by Mrs. Sorell, he went to the door of their apartment, through which it was easy to see them. The room was small, and meanly furnished. Mrs. Fanbrook, pale and emaciated, was reclining in an arm-chair, placed close to a fire, which seemed hardly sufficient to give her heat; near her on a table was a small candle, and beside her was her daughter, who had a glass of toast and water in her hand, which she held to her mother's lips.—When Mrs. Fanbrook had drank of the water, and eat a bit of toast, Sir Esmond saw her press the hand of her

daughter with a look of extreme affection, while Miss Fanbrook turned aside to wipe secretly away the tears that fell from her eyes.

Sir Esmond saw no more ; he retreated instantly from the door, struck deep with grief at the picture of sorrow and poverty he had seen.

He passed the night in forming plans for their relief, but could fix on none that entirely pleased him. Had Mrs. Orville been in town, he would not have hesitated a moment to request her to inquire into their situation, and relieve their distress; but in her absence, he knew not where to find a friend he could employ with equal satisfaction and advantage.

In the evening he was engaged to a ball and supper, given by Lady Maskly, where he expected all thoughts of Miss Fanbrook would be suspended ; but he was deceived. In an agreeable party of friends, she might perhaps have been less remembered, but Lady

Maskly's fête presented too striking a contrast to the scene of the preceding night, not to bring it forcibly to his remembrance. The splendour of the dresses he saw around him, he contrasted with the extreme simplicity of Miss Fanbrook's ;—the rich entertainment and luxurious wines lavished before him, he compared with the wretched fare of her mother ;—nor could the blaze of surrounding lights eclipse for a moment the feeble taper, which had shown him the pale face of Mrs. Fanbrook, and the tears of her daughter.

In the midst of the assembly, he found himself moralizing in a manner he had never done before, on the vast inequallity of human conditions, and he left it sickened with his reflections, and more than ever interested in relieving the distress, which had affected him so powerfully.

* * *

In the morning, Sir Esmond went to Mrs. Sorell's, to inquire after Mrs. Fanbrook, and

as he approached the house, he saw come out of it the man, from whose persecution he had delivered Miss Fanbrook, in the Park. Disturbed at seeing him, he hurried to Mrs. Sorell's to inquire the cause of his being there.

Mrs. Sorell told him he came daily to ask after Mrs. Fanbrook, whose illness gave him much concern.

"And does he show his concern," said Sir Esmond, "by being troublesome to her daughter?"

"He is far from troublesome, Sir, and has made her very handsome offers."

"Insolent offers!" cried Sir Esmond, passionately; "Miss Fanbrook shall not be insulted with impunity!"

"I beg Sir," said Mrs. Sorell, disturbed by the violence of his manner, "that you will compose yourself; the gentleman behaves with great civility to Miss Fanbrook, and

makes her no offers which she is not very well pleased to receive."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Sir Esmond; she could not even be pleased with the honourable addresses of such a man; she must instantly be removed from him."

"Sir," said Mrs. Sorell, in a supplicating tone, "I beseech you to make yourself easy; he will immediately leave Miss Fanbrook, if she desires it."

"He will not; I have myself been obliged to correct his insolence to her."

"It was you then, Sir, who met them in the park!—Miss Fanbrook's behaviour is, to be sure, a little capricious nows and thens, when she wants to enhance her value; but now that she and her mother have brought the gentleman to their own terms, they are in mighty good humour with him."

"You wrong them!" cried Sir Esmond, vehemently; you can have no reason to

think so, and he shall not be allowed to trouble them."

"Sure, Sir, I must know Miss Fanbrook much better than you ; but if you will trouble yourself about her admirers, there is another who is much more likely to carry her off, for he is very agreeable, and comes here daily upon her account."

The mention of another and more agreeable rival alarmed Sir Esmond in a different way, and made him anxiously endeavour to obtain all the intelligence of him he could, but he could not discover his name, or any particular, except that he was passionately fond of Miss Fanbrook, and was endeavouring to gain her affections.

"And what means does he employ for this?" asked Sir Esmond.

"Enticing behaviour, I suppose, Sir ; his manners are certainly more genteeler than those of her other admirers, though his offers are less tempting."

“ Miss Fanbrook,” said Sir Esmond, “ shall no longer be insulted by such offers.”

“ I am very sorry, Sir, you are so deceived in Miss Fanbrook ; she is not the woman you fancy : but it is easy for a pretty girl, who is well trained by an artful mother, to impose upon unsuspecting people.”

Sir Esmond was little disposed to credit Mrs. Sorell’s accounts, but he was disturbed by them, and endeavoured to persuade her that she was mistaken in her opinion of Miss Fanbrook and her mother ; but she persisted in saying that she could not be mistaken in persons she had hourly opportunities of seeing, though she confessed that Miss Fanbrook was far better than her mother.

Sir Esmond said she must be deceived in her opinion of Mrs. Fanbrook, as he had made offers for her daughter, which she had rejected.

“ When you waited on Mrs. Fanbrook, Sir,” replied Mrs. Sorell, “ I had no doubt

you intended to make offers for her daughter, and I had as little that they would be refused; for she always does so with gentlemen at first, in the hope of giving impressions which she may afterwards turn to her advantage. I dare say she is now extremely sorry you were so easily discouraged, for there are none of Miss Fanbrook's admirers, who can in any respect compare with you."

"The offers I made Mrs. Fanbrook," said Sir Esmond, "were so great, that she could not hope to gain any thing by delay."

"Did you offer marriage, Sir?"

"No."

"Ay, but that is the object, Sir, she has in view for her daughter, and if she does not succeed in it, she will make the best bargain she can for her otherwise. If she finds you do not pursue Miss Fanbrook, she will soon contrive some means to lure you back, and will then endeavour to inveigle you into a marriage by great pretensions to goodness."

“ This account, Mrs. Sorell, is very different from the impressions you gave me at first; on what foundation do you rest your suspicions?”

“ I discovered Mrs. Fanbrook’s character fully, only lately, Sir, in consequence of schemes she had been carrying on with several gentlemen, whom she tried to mislead, but has failed in all her designs. I am now aware of all her contrivances.”

However little Sir Esmond was inclined to trust Mrs. Sorell’s information, yet as it was not impossible she might have some strong ground for her suspicions, he began to think he ought not to be too confident in the good opinion he he entertained of Mrs. Fanbrook and her daughter. He thought he ought, at least, to make some further trial of them, and after endeavouring to secure Mrs. Sorell in his interest in such a way as would prevent Miss Fanbrook’s forming any engagement without his knowledge, he left her till he should consider how he ought to proceed.

After some deliberation, he resolved to wait upon Mrs. Fanbrook, and renew the disinterested offers he had formerly made, and from her behaviour hoped he might be able to discover how he ought to conduct himself farther.

Upon going, however, to Mrs. Sorell's the next morning, he was informed that Mrs. Fanbrook was too ill to be seen, and that he must wait a day or two before he could hope to meet with her.

As he was leaving the house, the gentleman whom he had first seen in the Park with Miss Fanbrook entered it, and Mrs. Sorell whispered Sir Esmond, that he was the gentleman she had mentioned to him.

The sight of him did not excite very agreeable sensations in Sir Esmond, and led him the following day with increased anxiety to Mrs. Sorell's. His intention now was to obtain an interview with Miss Fanbrook, if he could not see her mother ; to entreat her acceptance of pecuniary aid, and to urge, in the most

earnest manner, their immediate removal from Mrs. Sorell's, where they must be exposed to very disagreeable occurrences.

But his intentions were frustrated by the situation of Mrs. Fanbrook, who, Mrs. Sorell assured him, was extremely ill, and having had a sleepless night, was then endeavouring to get a little rest; her daughter, she added, was attending her, and could not be disturbed.

“I shall wait then,” said Sir Esmond, “till Miss Fanbrook is at liberty; I must see her to-day.”

“I hope, Sir, you will be on your guard with Miss Fanbrook; you will remember her character.”

“The conversation I mean to have with her,” said Sir Esmond, “will be a trial of her character.”

“It is very natural for gentlemen like you, Sir, to fancy you can discover a girl's character

by merely conversing with her, but, Sir, you do not know the arts of women; I was pretty old myself before I understood them rightly. Miss Fanbrook can act an artful part to a nicety, but after your genteel behaviour to me, I should be most ungrateful to let you be imposed upon. As I am really interested for you, Sir, I will show you a letter I received this morning from a gentleman, who once thought of them as you do, but is now obliged to change his opinion.

On saying this Mrs. Sorell took a letter from her pocket, and gave it to Sir Esmond. It contained inquiries after Mrs. Fanbrook's health, with strong injunctions to be careful of Miss Fanbrook for a few weeks till he should return to town to conclude the bargain he had begun with her mother, which he was desirous of doing, since he was forced to relinquish entirely the good opinion he had at first entertained of them.

Mrs. Sorell said she was not at liberty to mention the gentleman's name, but his letter was signed P——, and had in every particular

so entirely the appearance of a gentleman's letter, that it began to shake Sir Esmond's good opinion of Mrs. Fanbrook and her daughter. Mrs. Sorell's manners were so low, and she had apparently so little to recommend her, that though anxiety about Miss Fanbrook had made him always willing to listen to her, yet it was with little or no dependence on what she could say; but though she was mean, she might not be false, and when he reflected on this letter, and that it was scarcely to be supposed Mrs. Sorell could derive any advantage from depreciating Mrs. Fanbrook or her daughter in his opinion, he could not help fearing that he might be indeed mistaken respecting them.

He left Mrs. Sorell's without seeing Miss Fanbrook, and in a very unhappy state. He had felt a tender and serious passion growing in his breast for her, and was excessively shocked at the idea of her being unworthy of his regard.

He could not, however, trust Mrs. Sorell's accounts, and resolved to contrive some means of ascertaining the truth of her reports; but

before he had any time for this, he received by the penny post, a note from Mrs. Fanbrook requesting to see him the following day as soon as he conveniently could.

This note relieved his perplexities, and flattered him with the hope of a speedy termination to his doubts. He was persuaded Mrs. Fanbrook meant to apply to him for pecuniary assistance, and he determined to take the opportunity of making her such offers as must lead to the discovery of her character.

As early in the morning as he could expect to see her, he went to Mrs. Sorell's. Although now almost certain of being relieved from the painful state of uncertainty he suffered about Miss Fanbrook, his fear and anxiety were so great, as to deprive him of the calmness and presence of mind necessary to make the trial he proposed to advantage.

When he inquired of Mrs. Sorell for Mrs. Fanbrook, she told him she was still very ill, but when he added that he came to wait upon her at her own desire, she appeared extremely

surprised, and exclaimed, "La, Sir! Mrs. Fanbrook desire to see you?"

"Yes, is it so extraordinary?"

"No Sir, no; no to be sure Sir;—sure enough it is just what I foresaw: She has contrived some pretence for bringing you back, and if you are not extremely upon your guard she will entrap you into marriage with her daughter. But be cautious, Sir; be advised by me, and put no trust in her pretended goodness; she will tell you a prodigious fine story of her sufferings."

"Very well, Mrs. Sorell. Let Mrs. Fanbrook know that I am here."

"I will Sir; but do not believe what she says to you; for your own sake Sir make a trial of her character; for be certain, if you do not come to her terms, she will soon come to yours."

With some difficulty Sir Esmond got Mrs. Sorell to put an end to her admonitions, and

carry a message from him to Mrs. Fanbrook, which she had no sooner done, than she returned to conduct him to her chamber.

He found Mrs. Fanbrook alone in the same apartment in which he had formerly seen her, but apparently weaker and more depressed.

He expressed regret at seeing her so much indisposed.

She thanked him, and said it was the generous concern he had shown for her and her daughter, that had encouraged her to take the liberty of soliciting a visit from him. She was not able she said, to speak as she wished, but hoped he would pardon her making an extraordinary request in few words.

Mrs. Fanbrook paused, and Sir Esmond intreated her to say freely and briefly, whatever she wished.

“ You will not be surprised, Sir,” resumed she, “ that the goodness you manifested in

your behaviour to me a few weeks ago, made a deep impression on my mind; and that I have since thought of you as a resource granted me by heaven, in case of unlooked for calamity.—That moment is now arrived;—I believe myself dying, and shall leave my daughter poor and unprotected in a situation of the utmost difficulty and danger. Will you now fulfil your generous wish to place her in a state of safety and independence?"

Mrs. Fanbrook attempted to say more, but her voice failed, and she anxiously looked to Sir Esmond in expectation of an answer.

It was with the greatest difficulty he refrained from giving the answer she desired; but considering that the present moment was the only one he might ever have of making the wished-for trial, he replied, that he was extremely interested in the fate of her daughter, but confessed he was in a very different state from what he had been, when he first offered his services; he was then merely an admirer of Miss Fanbrook,—he now loved her to a degree that made her necessary to his

happiness, and any settlement Mrs. Fanbrook thought proper to demand, he would not think too great for so precious a gift.

It was some time before Mrs. Fanbrook could reply, but after several fruitless efforts to speak, she told him it was unnecessary to say how much she was disappointed, but he was mistaken in supposing she could listen to any dishonourable proposals for her daughter, or should now lay her under any obligation to the man, who could wound her by making them.

He entreated her to reflect before she finally rejected his offer, but she declined farther conversation, and implored him to leave her.

He urged her to consider the numerous hardships she would avoid by complying with his wishes, but she did not answer, and he left her without being able to perceive that his words had any effect in shaking her resolution.

Her melancholy aspect affected him so much,

that he was scarcely out of the room, before he wished to return and avow his real sentiments; but remembering Mrs. Sorell's expression, that she would soon come to his terms if he did not come to hers; he hurried out of the house to put it out of his power to deceive her.

He passed two days in a state of torturing anxiety, waiting impatiently for the moment he should find it proper to revisit her. Meanwhile he inquired after her repeatedly of Mrs. Sorell, who constantly assured him she was no worse, and expressed hopes of her speedy recovery; at the same time that she omitted no opportunity of throwing out expressions to the disadvantage of her character.

Though he did not credit her testimony, yet the constant repetition of her insinuations, aggravated his fears and strengthened his desire to be at least cautious in his conduct.

Yet such was his pity for Mrs. Fanbrook, that he could not resolve to delay his return to her till the period he had first fixed for it,

and had just determined to wait on her the following day, when he received a note from her requesting to see him if possible immediately.

This note he read with the utmost uneasiness, for he could not help fearing it was a prelude to the confirmation of all Mrs. Sorell's informations.

He instantly waited upon her, and on entering the room, was struck with the change which a few days had produced on her appearance. Her emaciated form was now quite ghastly, and when she began to speak, her voice faltered, and he observed that her whole frame shook.

In broken accents she told him that circumstances had occurred since they parted, which obliged her to accept of the offer he had made. What these circumstances were, she could not at present explain, and must therefore expect that her conduct would sink her in his opinion; but that was a misfortune to which she must submit, and only requested to

know if he would agree to the conditions she had to propose. The first was that he would settle a hundred pounds per annum on her daughter and her, to continue while either of them lived; secondly that he would permit them to reside together, and lastly, that Miss Fanbrook should be at liberty to leave him at the end of six months if she thought proper.

Sir Esmond replied that the last condition was the only one he could make the least objection to, but as he could never wish to detain Miss Fanbrook against her inclination, he would only hope, that at the period mentioned, she would not wish to leave him.

Mrs. Fanbrook then inquired how soon he could remove them from Mrs. Sorell's, as she was extremely anxious it should be done without delay.

He said he would not loose an instant in making the necessary arrangements, and the moment lodgings were provided, they should be removed to them.

She replied that it was of the utmost consequence to them to leave Mrs. Sorell's quickly, and begged it might be that evening at eight o'clock. At any other hour they might meet with obstacles to their departure, but at eight Mrs. Sorell would be from home, and they should be able to remove without inconvenience. She likewise entreated that he would not in the interim give Mrs. Sorell the smallest hint of their intentions, and that the lodgings he chose for them might be in as retired a situation as possible.

He promised the strictest compliance with all her requests, and then left her.

There was now an end of all uncertainty respecting Mrs. Fanbrook. Mrs. Sorell's opinions were but too just, and though excessively hurt at the discovery, he was as anxious as Mrs. Fanbrook could wish, to remove her daughter from Mrs. Sorell's, that it might not be in her power to consign her to another.

In the evening, at the hour appointed, he returned to Mrs. Sorell's, and found Mrs. and

Miss Fanbrook ready to depart. The former was so weak, that she was obliged to be carried to the coach he had brought for her. When she and her daughter, with their little baggage, were placed in it, they very kindly took leave of a plain elderly woman who attended them, and seemed much affected on parting from her.

They were soon conveyed to their new abode, where on arriving Mrs. Fanbrook fainted. It was long before she recovered, but when she was a little restored, Sir Esmond seeing Miss Fanbrook in the greatest agitation, begged they would both retire to rest, and he would wait upon them in the morning.

Mrs. Fanbrook wished him good night, saying, that she stood much in need of rest.

* * *

When Sir Esmond returned in the morning, he was received by Miss Fanbrook alone,

whose eyes seemed swelled by weeping. The preceding night he had observed, that she never appeared to see him, and scarcely replied to any thing he said, which he attributed to her attention being entirely engrossed by her mother; he now found she continued the same reserved behaviour, and the few words she was obliged to say to him, were delivered with the utmost embarrassment.

She told him that her mother was no better, and anxiously wished to see him in her chamber, being unable to leave her bed.

He immediately accompanied her to Mrs. Fanbrook's apartment, where Miss Fanbrook advanced softly to the bedside, and drawing aside the curtain, told her mother that he was in the room.

Mrs. Fanbrook begged he might be seated near her, and as soon as her daughter had withdrawn, addressed him thus.

"I was yesterday, Sir, unable to speak to

you as I wished, and I am now anxious to say a few words. The exertion I made to come here, destroyed the little strength I had left, and I believe that in a short time, I shall be no more. It is only for the sake of my daughter, I wish to linger a little longer, for she is helpless, and far from being formed to struggle with the hardships of her lot. On your goodness, however, I place the greatest reliance, and I am persuaded you will soon be convinced that she is innocent and amiable. —She is all that is valuable to me in life, and I cherish the hope that you will make her your wife.”

On the first view of Mrs. Fanbrook, Sir Esmond was affected by her appearance, and till the conclusion of her speech was preparing himself to answer as she could wish; but at the mention of the word wife, Mrs. Sorell's expressions instantly recurred to him; he saw it was indeed the aim of Mrs. Fanbrook to inveigle him into marriage, and disgusted with her conduct, he could only say, that it was

impossible to see Miss Fanbrook without being deeply interested for her, and that it should be his care to treat her with the tenderness she merited.

Mrs. Fanbrook did not reply, and appeared so exhausted with the little she had said, that he feared the apprehensions she entertained for herself were about to be immediately realized. He recalled Miss Fanbrook, and entreated she would permit him to send for a physician ; but she told him that she had already in vain urged her mother to do so ; Mrs. Fanbrook being persuaded her illness proceeded so entirely from distress of mind and too low a diet, that she could not believe that any thing but rest and proper regimen could be of service to her.

Although Sir Esmond could not be unaffected with the condition of Mrs. Fanbrook, yet not a doubt of her character now remained on his mind. Her suggesting his marrying her daughter after she had agreed to her being his mistress, proved the truth of Mrs. Sorell's

opinions, and he concluded that it was only her illness, which had prevented her trying in a more deliberate manner to draw him into a marriage.

* * * *

FOR some days Mrs. Fanbrook continued in a very weak state, and was constantly attended by her daughter, who, Sir Esmond saw, was too unhappy about her mother to be able to leave her.

When Mrs. Fanbrook began to recover, Sir Esmond hoped the distress of Miss Fanbrook would abate, but neither the spirits of the mother or daughter appeared to recover in proportion to the returning strength of the former, and the reserved behaviour of the latter seemed quite undiminished.

As he could no longer attribute this solely to anxiety about her mother, he began to fear it was owing to the recollection of a more favoured object, or to reluctance to him as a

stranger, and willing to encourage the latter idea, he pleased himself with the hope that in a few days she would treat him with less reserve.

Time, however, made no alteration in her behaviour, and he soon believed that she was the innocent being he had at first supposed her.

Although he had behaved to her with the utmost gentleness and delicacy, he was unable to overcome the tremor into which the sight of him constantly threw her; she became pale and agitated whenever he approached, and at one time fainted from mere apprehension, without his giving her any cause for uneasiness.

This behaviour, while it persuaded him of her innocence, again awakened doubts of the truth of Mrs. Sorell's reports with regard to her mother and excited the most ardent curiosity respecting the character of Mrs. Fanbrook. Mrs. Sorell had allowed that Miss Fanbrook was infinitely better than her

mother, but if she was at all mistaken in the character of the one, she might also be so in that of the other, and there certainly were circumstances in the situation of Mrs. Fanbrook, which might be urged in her favour; yet he thought scarcely any circumstances could justify her conduct, and the more he reflected upon it, the more he was struck with horror and astonishment at the mother, who could thus sacrifice such a daughter.

He told Miss Fanbrook that he regretted exceedingly the distress he saw her suffer in his presence, and entreated to know if he was personally disagreeable to her, or if she preferred another?

“Neither,” she replied: “there is nobody I prefer to you; your behaviour has been generous, and I believe you have treated me with more consideration than I had any reason to expect.”

He then conjured her to tell him if she had not been induced to receive his visits against her inclination.

She assured him that her mother had entered into no engagements with him without her consent.

He replied, that although she had consented to them, it was evident from the misery they occasioned her, that Mrs. Fanbrook ought never to have made them.

She eagerly declared that her mother would rather die than do any thing she thought wrong.—“ But,” added she, “ our misfortunes——”

Matilda pronounced these words with difficulty, and could not proceed; several times she attempted to speak, but her voice failed,—her colour rose and fell from deep crimson to the most livid paleness, and she appeared so overcome, that Sir Esmond’s sole care was to sooth and sustain her.

He determined not to trouble her with farther questions, but to try how her mother would explain her behaviour.

Mrs. Fanbrook was still so feeble as to be unable to sit up more than half an hour at a time, and, though evidently much better than she had been for some days after she left Mrs. Sorell's, she was so very weak, and seemed to recover so slowly, that it appeared extremely doubtful if she could live beyond a very short period.

Sir Esmond requested an interview with her alone, and after informing her of the behaviour of her daughter, asked how he was to interpret conduct so opposite to what he had reason to expect, after the engagements she had so readily made with him.

Mrs. Fanbrook listened to his account of her daughter with a most mournful expression of countenance, and sighed deeply, while a tear stole down her cheek ; when he ceased speaking, she thus answered.

“ A heavy train of misfortunes, Sir, has compelled my daughter and me into the situation in which we now are. It was the only means we had left to avoid a worse evil ; and

her conduct since, has been the natural consequence of the gentleness of her disposition, and the purity of her heart. If you will listen to my story, I will disclose to you the events of my life, and fully explain the causes of that conduct, which has so justly excited your surprise."

Sir Esmond assured her he would listen with the utmost attention, and think himself obliged by her confidence.

She thus began.—“At the commencement of the present war, my husband was a captain in a regiment of foot, and went to the West Indies, on the expedition commanded by Lord St. Vincent and Lord Grey, where he soon fell a victim to the yellow fever

He was a very amiable man, but my affliction for his death, was in some measure alleviated by reflection on the painfulness of his situation. No man who is not possessed of fortune or interest to promote himself in the army, should be a soldier; for among the numerous evils incident to the profession,

he must always find himself in a state of poverty. A few weeks before my husband's death, he wrote to me, that as soon as he could leave the army without dishonour, he would retire, and live on bread and water, rather than risk the being again a witness of scenes so miserable and disgraceful to human nature, as he had seen at Guadaloupe.

He left me very indifferently provided for. Before the war, we were possessed of two thousand pounds, which he hoped would be a support to his daughter and myself, in case of his death; but unfortunately the bankruptcies in ninety-three, reduced it to three hundred.

On the interest of this sum, however, with industry and economy, I made myself independent, and for the sake of Matilda, sustained every difficulty with cheerfulness. I had a cottage in Surrey, with a garden and an acre of ground, on which I kept a cow, and I paid my rent with the produce of my dairy.

In this way I had lived quietly for some time, when my tranquillity was suddenly disturbed by the attention paid to my daughter, by a man of the name of Barnaby. He was a worthless character, and his behaviour justly excited in me the utmost alarm. I had reason to believe, he would not scruple any means of getting possession of her, and I determined to remove to a distance.

Other circumstances conspired to render my place of residence very disagreeable. The beauty of Matilda drew a number of admirers about her, not one of whom I could wish her to marry, while some of them were men of very coarse manners and troublesome behaviour. The tranquillity of our cottage was thus destroyed, and her safety endangered. I sent her privately to the care of a friend I had in town; settled my affairs as expeditiously and secretly as possible, and followed her to London, where, to conceal us effectually from Barnaby, who I knew was in search of her, I changed our name, and gave up all correspondence with any acquaintance I had in Surrey.

I should have preferred an abode in the country, but was at a loss where to go without risking more expense than my finances admitted of; and I had, besides, other temptations to reside in town. There, I could easily command needlework, by which we might improve our little income, and my friend Mrs. Sewell, to whose care I had sent my daughter, offered us an apartment in her house, which would save us the expense of lodgings, and afford us many advantages. Mrs. Sewel was a widow, who had a small jointure that allowed her only the necessaries of life, but she could easily accommodate us in her house, and the friendship which had long subsisted between us, made us happy in being together.

With her we passed half a year very agreeably: but after that period, I was made extremely unhappy by Matilda's having ailments which threatened a consumption. The air of London, and the sedentary life she led at work, was thought the cause of this; and I was advised by Dr. Z——, to carry her to the country, where she might have the benefit

of a milk diet, and regular exercise on horseback.

I did so, and she soon recovered so perfectly, that I ventured to bring her back to town in October.

I had several inducements to this. Our excursion had obliged me to draw for a part of our little money, and it was therefore necessary we should return to the seat of labour, especially as London was less expensive than any place near it; but my principal motive for being in town, was to be with Mrs. Sewell, who was in a declining state of health, and very desirous of seeing us.

She did not long survive our return, and being then obliged to seek another lodging, I went to Mrs. Sorell's, that Matilda might have the benefit of an easy walk at command, without my being too far removed from the people who gave me employment.

In my distress for Mrs. Sewell, I did not sufficiently consider, that, in so public a place

as the Park, my daughter would be too much exposed to observation. She soon attracted the notice of several gentlemen, whose attentions to her gave me much uneasiness, and the more, as I was far from being pleased with Mrs. Sorrel. She had been recommended to me by a servant of Mrs. Sewell's, who thought well of her; but it soon appeared that she was a woman of very low and disagreeable manners, and encouraged the pursuit of my daughter for her own emolument, which I discovered by means of a gentleman, who behaved to me with honour and humanity.

You will easily imagine how unhappy this discovery made me. I determined, that the moment Matilda was recovered from a cold she had contracted, to retire to a remote part of the country, where I hoped we might live safely on the interest of our little money, aided by what the labour of our hands could supply. The expense of living was now such, that it was impossible we could any longer support the station we had hitherto in some degree preserved; but, in the condition of

peasants in an obscure village, I flattered myself we might still have peace and independence.

My daughter was seventeen, and her delicacy of frame, and uncommon beauty, were heavy misfortunes in her situation. Men require chastity in women, yet too many even of those who maintain the reputation of good characters in the world, seem to think the women who are not supported by a certain rank in life, lawful prey. The beauty and forlorn state of Matilda, made her an object to men of every condition; and she reminded me perpetually of a poor hare, who was in constant dread of pursuit.

It was, however, greatly owing to the uncommon sweetness of her countenance, and extreme softness of her manners, that she was so much the object of admiration. Beauty may dazzle the eyes, and rouse the passions, but will not alone continue to please.

Matilda's state of health again awakening my apprehensions for her, I called on Dr. Z.

who had attended her at Mrs. Sewell's, to ask his advice. He told me, that he did not think her ailments would be of any consequence, if they were properly attended to, but that a sedentary life was very bad for her; that I ought to carry her to the country as soon as the weather was a little milder, and make her ride daily on horseback; and in the mean while it would be proper to give her frequent airings in a carriage; avoid exposing her to damp air, cold, or fatigue; with various other attentions which were all impracticable in my situation.

He saw me change colour as he spoke, and mistaking the cause of my uneasiness, was very humanely at pains to assure me, that I had nothing to fear, if I pursued the measures he recommended; but confessed, that otherwise, she was in danger of falling into a lingering state of bad health.

It was only the day after this conversation that you called upon me, yet I had no hesitation in declining all pecuniary assistance from you; for though I could believe you might

give it from disinterested motives, yet I was unwilling to lay her under obligations to any young man, or afford him a pretext for visiting her.

But the following week I was taken ill of a severe cold, which at first had all the appearance of a fever, and the apprehension of a speedy death gave a new current to my thoughts. I cannot describe the horror I felt at the idea of leaving her unprotected, without even that little knowledge of the world to guide her which many young people of her age possess, the recluse life we had led having kept her a novice in the affairs of life.

From her earliest days I had endeavoured to inspire her with the purest and most perfect principles of virtue, and had given her all the instruction which conversation, and a small, but good selection of books could supply ; but I had been careful to keep her ignorant of the vices of mankind, being anxious she should, as long as possible, feel that charm in life which renders it so pleasing before our know-

ledge of the depravity of human nature embitters all our comfort.

I had not a friend in the world to whose care I could consign her ; she had no near relations ; I had survived the companions of my youth, and the unsettled life I had led with my husband, had prevented my forming friendships that could now be useful to her. Most ardently did I wish that we could die together, or even that I could see her expire, though I should have the misfortune to survive her.—I could bear to be deprived of her by death ; but to leave her exposed to all the misery of poverty and ill health,—a prey to the licentious, was an image too dreadful !—You can have no conception of it, unless you were a parent.

When I began to recover, the anguish I suffered was less poignant, but still it was great. I felt that I could place no dependence on my life. Though hardly fifty, and blessed with a good constitution, distress of mind, fatigue, and very poor fare, had so impaired my strength as to give me just cause of alarm ;

and were it even otherwise, my prospects for Matilda were gloomy in the extreme. Could my personal exertions secure her from danger, or could I have any hope of seeing her condition improved? Marriage seemed the only way in which this was possible; but, in our unfortunate state, what expectation could I have of her marrying to my satisfaction, when even the favoured daughters of fortune can so seldom make a happy choice?

While my mind was thus harassed by the most afflicting views, I received fresh cause of alarm about her from the behaviour of one of her admirers, whose name is Peel. A few weeks before he had made me great offers for her; but being obliged to go into the country, we were relieved from him for a time. He now returned, and was extremely troublesome. He was a rich elderly man, a husband, and a father: some years ago I received very unfavourable impressions of him, which his conduct now confirmed.

At this time I was not without uneasiness about another of her followers of the name of

Phipps. His views were not more honourable, but his appearance and manners were far more agreeable than Peel's, and his object seemed to be to get possession of her person by engaging her affections, for he was constantly in waiting to catch opportunities of speaking to her, and always addressed her in the most insinuating manner.

She observed my instructions in treating him with reserve; but she was flattered by his devotion to her, and I was greatly afraid he might ingratiate himself into her favour.

From these fears, her meeting with you in some degree relieved me. She was struck with the superior gentleness of your manners, and was more flattered by the kind of respect you showed her, than by all his pointed attentions. Your behaviour in the Park, when you rescued her from Peel, made a deep impression on her. The solicitude you discovered for her safety, in urging her never to walk without me; your requesting to wait upon us both, instead of endeavouring, like

Phipps, to seek opportunities of meeting with her alone, though you appeared to admire her as much as he did, gave her the most favourable opinion of your character. The fear of your suffering by Peel for the service you had rendered her, contributed likewise to interest her for you in a manner that greatly heightened her prepossessions in your favour, and I soon perceived the seeds of love were planted in her heart.

I encouraged her partiality for you as a counterpoise to the seductive arts of Phipps, persuaded that separation would soon erase the impression you had made. She was conscious that it ought to be erased; for, on my inquiring, after she had been two days silent about you, why she did not speak of you as usual, she answered, that she had been trying to forget you. I asked why she should wish to forget the man to whom she was so much obliged? She blushed, and said, that she thought of you perhaps too much, since she could never hope to see you more.

At this part of her narrative, Mrs. Fanbrook was obliged to stop. She had not proceeded so far without many interruptions; and she was now so much exhausted by weakness, that she was under the necessity of delaying the sequel of her story till the next day.

* * * *

THE following morning Mrs. Fanbrook was able to recommence her narrative.

“The behaviour of Peel,” resumed she, “kept me in such constant anxiety and terror, as to affect my health. Again I became apprehensive of my life being quickly terminated, and experienced the recurrence of all that wretchedness, which my illness had at first produced. Till this period, I had always been at a loss to determine what was the most painful sensation a human being could suffer.—I now felt, that even remorse could hardly equal the anguish of seeing an amiable and beloved object treated with indignity.—Matilda in the power of a Barnaby or Peel, was to me the completion of wretchedness.

I cast my eyes round in despair ; Doctor Z.

to whom I would have applied, was gone abroad, but you occurred to me,—no longer as the man I dreaded to see near her,—no longer as an acquaintance from whom I might hope assistance, but as a blessed friend! But to explain this properly, it is necessary to tell you that I was no stranger to your character. When we first met, I thought I was acquainted with your face, but could not recollect your name. The moment I knew it, I remembered that I had seen you, when you were about sixteen, and had then received high impressions in your favour. Two days after you gave me your letter, I had occasion to call on Doctor Z. and took the opportunity to make inquiries about you. He told me he was acquainted with you, and esteemed you highly; that your general character was excellent, and you were unsullied by the vices which too often characterise young men of fortune.

This account from so very respectable a man as Doctor Z. joined to the impressions I had formerly received, and your behaviour to Matilda, led me at length to rest upon you for

the deliverance I wished. I wrote to you accordingly to request an interview, of which you know the result.

I cannot express the shock I suffered from your behaviour, which I could only attribute to a defect in your character. The disappointment it occasioned, increased the weakness of my frame, and while I was with difficulty sustaining myself under the misery that oppressed me, a sister-in-law of Mrs. Sorell's, who had been some weeks in her house, came into my apartment, when Mrs. Sorell was from home, and desired to speak with me alone.

When Matilda had withdrawn, she requested a solemn promise that I would never discover to Mrs. Sorell the information she was going to give me, and having obtained it, she then told me that my daughter was no longer safe in Mrs. Sorell's house. That she had overheard several conversations between her and different gentlemen, from which it appeared that she encouraged or discouraged their views with regard to Matilda entirely as it suited her own interest; throwing ob-

stacles in the way of those who intended her seduction, and encouraging others, who had scruples about it, by insinuations to her disadvantage. By this means she kept a number in pursuit, while she took money from all, but finding it would no longer be possible to do so, she had agreed to betray her soon into the hands of Peel, on condition of receiving from him an annuity for life. It was the annuity which had determined her to prefer his interest to that of Phipps, who had formed a deliberate plan for the seduction of my daughter, and who, though less brutal in the means of accomplishing his object, was not less bent on the destruction of Matilda, and of effecting it in a manner, that might ultimately perhaps be more fatal to her peace.

It is impossible to describe the horror and despair which seized me on receiving Mrs. Benton's informations, of the truth of which I could not, from a variety of circumstances, have the least doubt. Indeed the good woman offered to give me an opportunity of hearing Mrs. Sorell in conversation with Peel, but this was wholly unnecessary, nor was I equal to

the task. My sole care was to save Matilda, but how was this to be accomplished? I was unable to bear the shortest journey; I had no friend to assist me; and by merely removing to other lodgings, could I hope to escape the pursuit of Peel or Phipps? Were I even to elude them, were there not other Peels, and other Phipps' to be feared?—Barnaby had driven me out of Surrey, and I now saw that Matilda's attractions would bring her persecutors in every place.

The wandering life I had led as a soldier's wife, had made me well acquainted with the dangers to which women in the inferior ranks of life, are exposed. They are such as the stationary and virtuous class of females in genteel life, can seldom form an idea of, though no woman, be her station what it may, is altogether secure from them. Strange state of depravity!—That even men, who support a respectable place in society, should, for the sake of selfish gratification, seek with unrelenting cruelty the ruin of the beings they love, and the destruction of the qualities they most admire!—Even the wives and sisters

of such men, I have known lend their aid to the destruction of innocence, and if women of reputation can be employed to ensnare, what female can be secure !

The violent agitation these reflections threw me into, affected me so much, that next morning I thought my life in immediate danger, and this aggravated my terror for Matilda to a degree, that almost bereft me of my senses.

At that moment Mrs. Benton came into my room to tell me, that after she had left me the evening before, she had overheard another conversation between Mrs. Sorell and Peel, who she found came late at night to avoid meeting with Sir Esmond Anson. From the information she now gave, I discovered that it was the fear of your interfering to save Matilda, which had induced him to make exorbitant offers to Mrs. Sorell, and her to agree to forward his designs sooner than she would otherwise have done. She told him, that although she had so far succeeded in convincing you that my daughter and I were unworthy, as to destroy your anxiety to remove us from her

lodgings, yet, you were so fond of Matilda, that you would certainly endeavour to obtain her as a mistress, and would, if not prevented, soon frustrate their designs in one way or other. They then agreed that they would immediately deliberate on the best means of putting Matilda in his possession, but resolved that they would put no plan for it in execution, till Mrs. Benton left town, which she was to do in two days.

It was at six o'clock in the morning that she gave me this information, for she had risen while Mrs. Sorell was asleep, to have an opportunity of speaking to me without her knowledge. She added that I ought immediately to remove with Matilda, where she could be under the care of a friend, for my state of health did not permit me to be a sufficient protection to her; and said that it would be necessary to depart in the evening, when Mrs. Sorell would be from home, that my place of abode might be unknown both to her and a man of the name of Thomas Judkin, a spy, whom Peel kept in waiting during the day to watch Matilda, when she went abroad.

His fear of her giving encouragement to you or Phipps, made him employ a spy, whose vigilance, Mrs. Benton said, it was of the utmost consequence to elude, as she understood he was a villain fit for any cruel or treacherous purpose.

I told her that I had no friend to whom I could apply, nor knew of any place in town to which I could remove Matilda with safety, but hoped that she could recommend a lodging, where we could remain secure, at least for a few weeks.

She could not afford me the smallest assistance, but she felt for the anguish she saw me suffer, and suggested as the only means she could think of for our relief, that we should confide in you; for even if we should not be able to undeceive you, she thought it far better that my daughter should be in your possession than in Peel's.

I caught at her proposal as a person retreats from a horrid precipice they had shuddered to behold; yet I had not power to ask Matilda, who was present, what she thought of it,—my looks alone besought her opinion.

She gave me a look of indescribable distress, and falling upon my neck, wept so bitterly, that I almost thought a voluntary death preferable to the cruel alternative to which we were reduced.—She soon, however, told me, that no condition could be so horrible to her, as being in the power of Peel; and that the sooner you could remove us from Mrs. Sorell's the better.

It was then settled that she should write a note to request a meeting with you, and Mrs. Benton undertook to deliver it into your own hand. Before she left us, she urged our removing, if possible, in the evening, as Mrs. Sorell was engaged from home, and we should have an opportunity of departing without trouble.

The prospect of deliverance from Peel and Mrs. Sorell, calmed a little our agitated spirits, and permitted me to consider in what manner I should address you. I had neither strength nor time to explain my conduct, nor could I hope that, prepossessed as you were against me, you could be easily unde-

ceived. I resolved, therefore, to make no attempt to tell you my story at Mrs. Sorell's, but merely to make such conditions for Matilda, as in the event of my sudden decease, which I expected every moment, should secure her future safety. It was at her particular request, that I included myself in the settlement you were to make.

For a few minutes after you left us here at night, feeling ourselves rescued from Mrs. Sorell, rendered us almost happy; but soon the sad consciousness of the means by which we had effected our release, returned, and we passed the night in bitterness and tears.

In the morning, I reproached myself severely for having indulged a sorrow that lessened my chance of recovery, and anxious to employ the little strength I had left, for the benefit of Matilda, I attempted to speak to you in her favour.

The very peculiar and strong look of distrust, which instantly rose in your countenance, on my expressing a hope that you

would make her your wife, showed me how very decided your prepossession were against us, and how little I could hope to remove them, by any thing I could say. The faintness which then overcame me, you attributed entirely to weakness; but it was more owing to disappointment. I was, however, wholly unable to proceed with the explanation I intended, and I passed the day in a state it is impossible to describe.—But agonizing as were my own feelings for the innocent Matilda, the wretchedness I saw her suffer was still more overwhelming, and made me anxious to employ the few hours I might have to live, in endeavouring to soften to her, as much as it was possible, her miserable fate.

I told her, that although it might be a work of time to recover your good opinion, and must be effected by her conduct more than by our representations, yet I could not have a doubt that you would in time be convinced of her worth, which, uniting with your attachment to her, would induce you to offer her your hand; and that the parti-

ality and esteem she had for you, made you already the man whom I should wish her to marry.

The views I thus held out to her, softened her unhappiness, and I mention it to explain to you in part, why she is not now so totally overwhelmed with grief as she was at first; but your behaviour has done far more in alleviating her affliction, and has inspired myself with such confidence in your goodness, as has restored me to the state you see. I am still extremely weak, and have no dependence on my life; but in dying, I shall now at least, have the consolation of knowing that you respect her feelings.—I have for some days anxiously waited for such a return of strength, as would enable me to tell you our story, and I was yesterday morning on the eve of requesting an interview for the purpose, when you anticipated my design. I thank heaven for having permitted me to explain to you my conduct, and I trust it will effectually destroy the impressions you received from Mrs. Sorell."

Mrs. Fanbrook ceased, but Sir Esmond could not immediately reply. Her story, delivered in a simple, yet dignified manner, made a deep impression upon him; and there was an expression in her countenance, which commanded his respect, and almost compelled him to believe her virtuous; yet, when once suspicion is deeply rooted in the mind, it is difficult to eradicate. Though her narrative had every appearance of truth, it might yet be a mere fabrication, to ensnare him into marriage with her daughter; and, notwithstanding his belief in the innocence of the latter, the idea of deception on the part of the mother was so painful, that the more he reflected, the more he was perplexed.

Mrs. Fanbrook saw his embarrassment, and guessing the cause, said, that she could not immediately expect him to give implicit credit to her veracity, but hoped he was at least so well convinced of the worth of Matilda, as to resume the generous intentions he had formerly entertained in her favour.

This call on Sir Esmond's generosity put

an end to his silence. He assured Mrs. Fanbrook, that if the resumption of these intentions depended only on his opinion of Miss Fanbrook, it would not be a moment protracted ; but that he could not now part from her without the total sacrifice of his happiness, and he hoped separation was unnecessary, for if she felt for him the partiality Mrs. Fanbrook imagined, he might hope to gain soon her affections so completely, as to prevent her suffering any uneasiness in his presence.

“ But is it possible,” said Mrs. Fanbrook, “ that you can be more regardless of her innocence, than of her happiness? Time and increased affection would certainly lessen the pain she has lately felt in seeing you, but can you wish that affection should render her easy in her situation? Far more unhappy would it be for her to become the victim of her feelings, than of her misfortunes!—At present she regards her engagement with you as an inevitable evil, which however painful, she wishes to believe ought not to degrade her in your eyes, or her own ; but were affection to betray her into error, she would condemn her-

self far more than she deserved ; her remorse would be unceasing, nor could marriage restore her to self approbation. Your unwillingness to part from her makes you forgetful of the nobleness natural to your character, but let me yet hope, that you will protect her as a brother, if you do not think her worthy to be your wife."

Mrs Fanbrook paused, but Sir Esmond not seeming inclined to answer, she proceeded : " I cannot, indeed, suppose that you could approve of marrying a woman without rank, fortune, or connections ; the daughter of a person in whose favour you have no testimony but her own,—yet if you do not marry, you cannot for Matilda's sake, leave her too quickly. Absence may eradicate your passion for her, and will prevent her suffering by you. She has confessed to me, that your generous behaviour has affected her so much, that if she could see you without fear, she would wish to see you always. Her heart is naturally susceptible of every tender impression, but as yet I have been the sole object of her affection ; she would, therefore, in a short time, bestow on

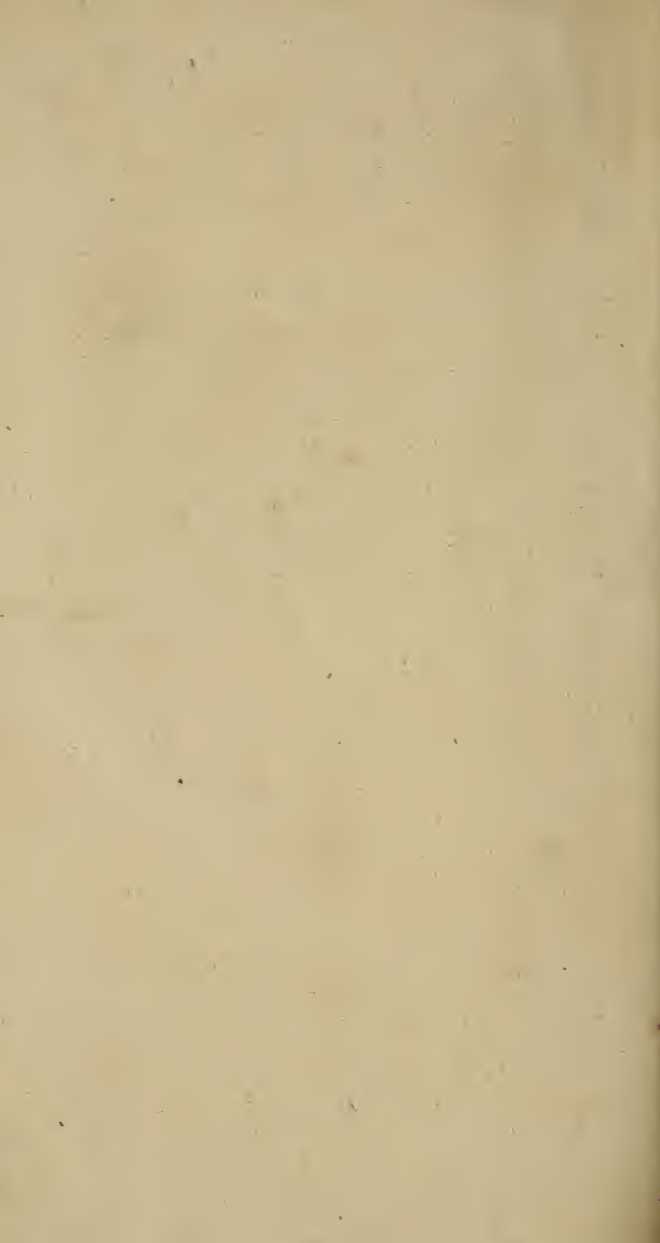
you all the tenderness of which she is capable, and were she then to be forsaken, her gentle nature would bend with sorrow to the ground.

Sir Esmond was not insensible to the force of Mrs. Fanbrook's reasoning. He felt that if there was any probability, even possibility of her story being true, he ought either to marry Matilda, or leave her at liberty; yet he found so much difficulty in forming a resolution, that he was obliged to request Mrs. Fanbrook would allow him time to consider what he ought to do.

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